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# TOXIN

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W.L.CollaPh.Sc.

"The Child, The Child: My Cartino!"  
screamed his mother. Adrianus gave  
him to her outstretched arms.

OUIDA

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# TOXIN

*A SKETCH*



LONDON

T. FISHER UNWIN

PATERNOSTER SQUARE

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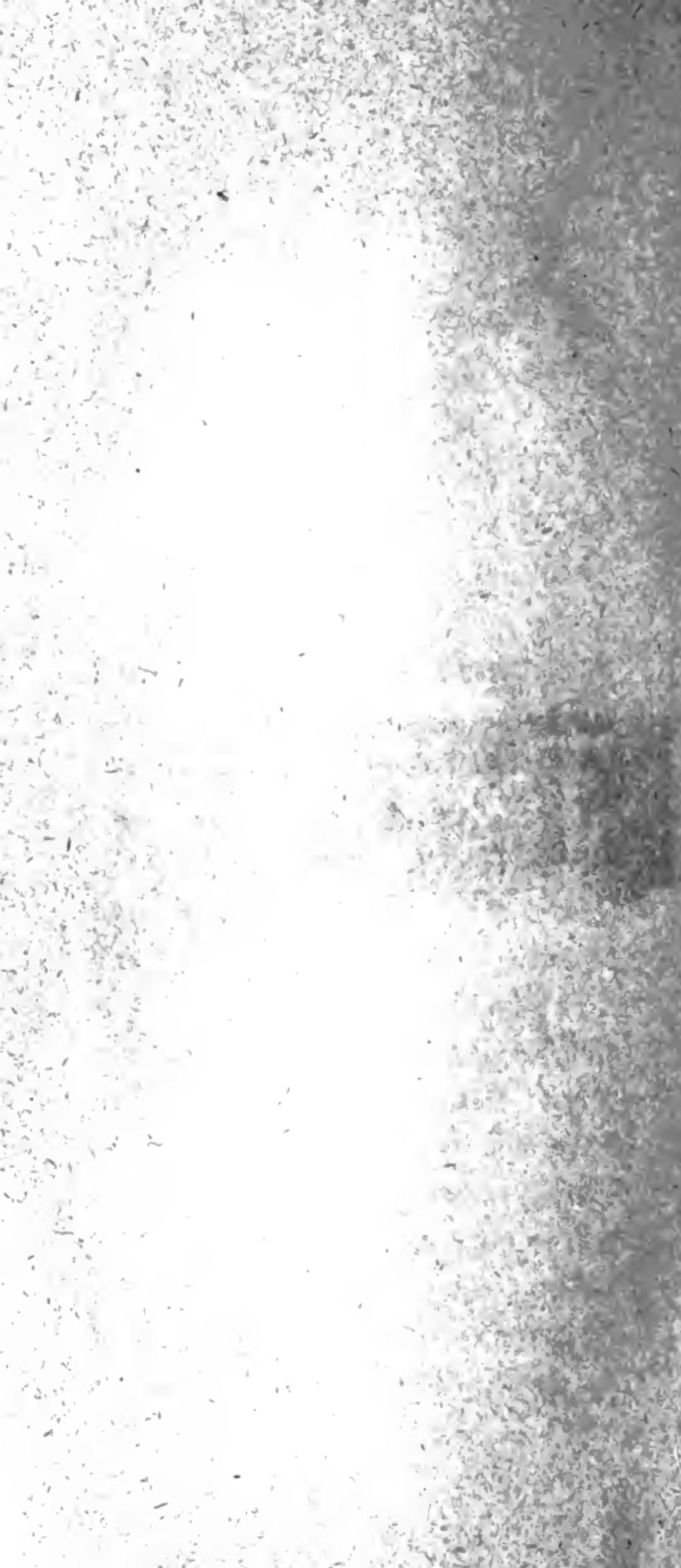
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## I.

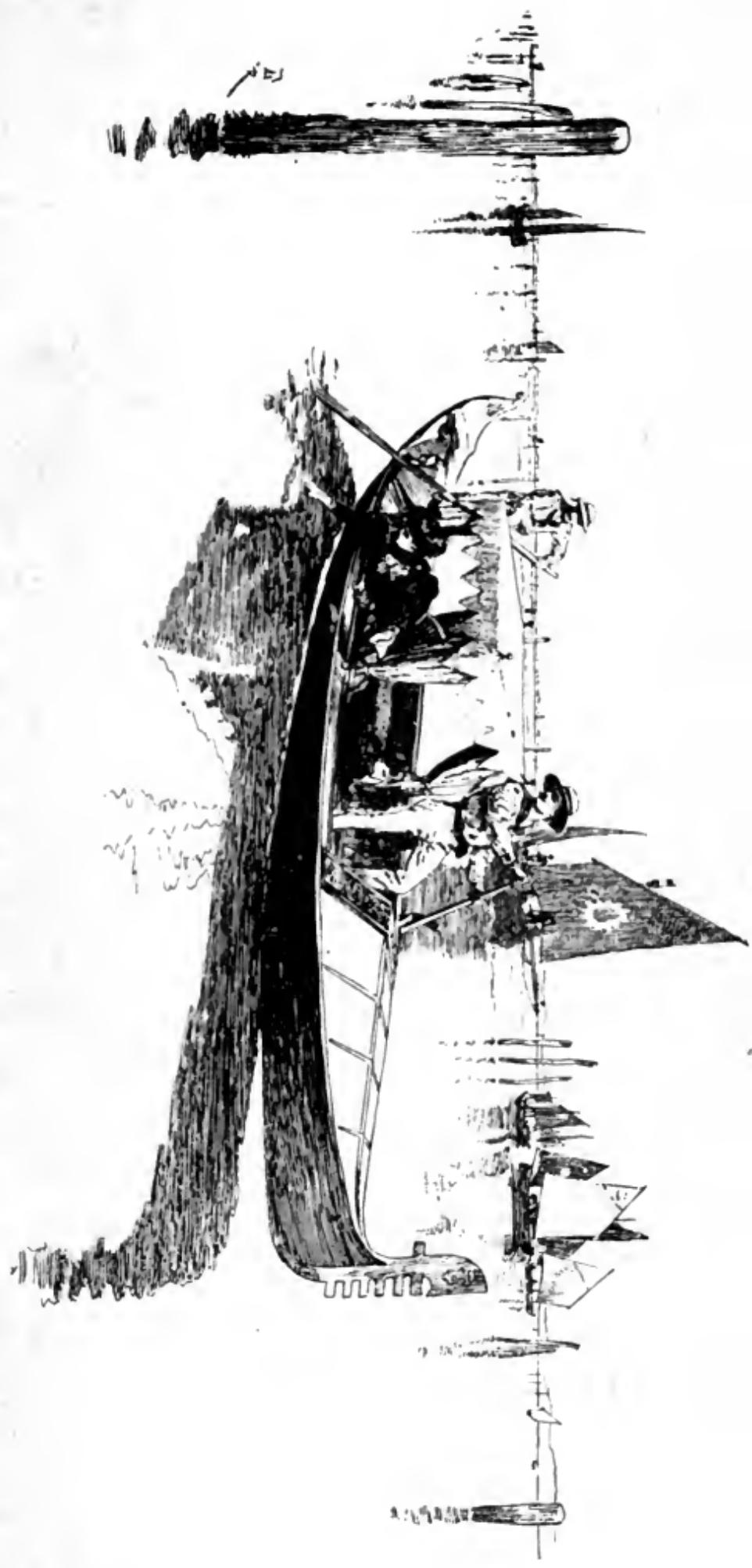
 "H ! my necklace !" cried a fair woman as she leaned over the side of her gondola.

A string of opals, linked and set in gold, had been loosened from her throat, and had slid down into the water of the lagoon, midway between the Lido and the city of Venice. But the gondola was moving swiftly under the impulsion of a rower fore and aft, and, though they stopped a few moments after at her cry, the spot where it had fallen was already passed and left

behind. She was vexed and provoked. She had many jewels, but the opal necklace was an heirloom, and of fine and curious workmanship. The gondoliers did their best to find it, but in vain. They were in the deeper water of the sailing roads, which were marked out by the lines of poles, and the necklace, a slight thing, had been borne away by the current setting in from the open sea.

It was a pale afternoon in late summer; the heat was still great; the skies and the waters were of the same soft, dreamy, silvery hue, and the same transparency and ethereality were on the distant horizons of the hills, west and east. The only colour there was came from the ruddy painted sails of some fruit-laden market boats which were passing to leeward.

"Oh! my necklace!" cried a fair woman, as she leaned over the side of the gondola.





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Neither of the men could swim; many Venetians cannot; but they got over the side, and waded up to their waists in the water, and with their oars struck and sounded the sandy bottom, whilst she encouraged them with praise and extravagant promise of reward. Their efforts were of no avail. The lagoon, which has been the grave of so many, kept the drowned opals.

“We will go back and send divers,” she said to her men who, wet to their waists, were well content to turn the head of the gondola back to the city.

They wore white clothes with red sashes and red ribbons round their straw hats; they were in her private service; they steered quickly home again over the calm water-way, and in and out the crowded craft by the Schiavone past the Customs House, and S.

Giorgio, and the Salvatore, until they reached a palace on the Grand Canal, which was their mistress's residence, with poles painted red and white, with coronets on their tops, marking the landing stairs in the old Venetian fashion.

"I have lost my opals in the water!" she cried to a friend who was on one of the balconies of the first floor.

"I am glad you have lost them," replied her friend. "They are stones of misfortune."

"Nonsense! They were beautiful, and they were Ninetta Zaranegra's, poor Carlo's great-great-grandmother; they were one of her nuptial presents a hundred and twenty years ago. I must have the men dive and dredge till they are found. The water is so shallow. I cannot think how the collar can have

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vanished so completely in such a moment or time."

She ascended her palace steps, and dismissed her gondoliers with a gesture, as she paused in the entrance-hall to tell her major-domo of her loss, and consult him as to the best means to recover the necklace. The hall was painted in fresco, with beautiful Moorish windows, and a groined and gilded ceiling, and a wide staircase of white marble, uncarpeted. Opposite the entrance was a latticed door through which was seen the bright green of acacias, crataegus, and laurel growing in a garden.

On the morrow, when it was known through Venice that the rich and generous Countess Zaranegra had lost her jewels, all the best divers hurried to the place where the opals had dropped, and worked sedulously from daybreak

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to find it, sailors and fishermen and boatmen all joining in the search, in hope to merit the reward she promised. But no one of them succeeded. Their efforts were useless. The tenacious water would not yield up its prey. The opals were gone, like spindrift.





The winter came and went, wrapping Venice in its mists.





## II.

HE winter came and went, wrapping Venice in its mists, driving the sea-birds into the inland canals, making the pigeons sit ruffled and sad on the parapets of the palaces, and leaving many a gondolier unemployed, to warm his hands over little fires of driftwood under the snow-sprinkled rafters and naked vine-branches of his *traghetto*. The gondoliers of the Ca' Zaranegra were more fortunate ; they could sit round the great bronze brazier in the hall

of their lady's house, and the gondola was laid up high and dry to await the spring, and their wages were paid with regularity and liberality by the silent and austere major-domo who reigned in the forsaken palace, for their lady was away on warmer shores than the wind-beaten, surge-drowned, sea-walls of their city.

The winter was hard ; snow lay long on the Istrian hills and on the Paduan pastures ; there was ice on the rigging of the Greek brigs in the Giudecca, and the huge ocean steamers from the east looked like uncouth prehistoric beasts, black and gigantic, as they loomed through the fogs, moving slowly towards the docks under cautious pilotage. There were laughter and warmth in the theatres, and the sounds of music came from



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some of the palaces; but in the Calle, in the fishermen's quarters, on the islands, on board the poor rough sailing craft, and amongst the maritime population generally, there were great suffering and much want; and by the bar of Malomocco and off the coast of Chioggia there were wrecks which strewed the waters with broken timbers and dashed drowning sailors like seaweed on to the wooden piles. Stout boats were broken like shells, and strong seafaring men were washed to and fro like driftwood. But the frail opal necklace of the Countess Zaranegra was safe in the midst of the strife; it had fallen into a hollow in a sunken pile and lay there, unharmed, whilst above it the stormy tides rose and fell, and the winds churned the cream of the surf. There it lay, all through the

rough winter weather, whilst the silvery gulls died of hunger, and the sea swallows were hurled by the hurricane on to the lanterns of lighthouses and against the timbers of vessels.

It weathered many storms, this frail toy, made to lie on the warm breasts of women, whilst the storm kings drew down to their death the bread-winners for whom wife and children vainly prayed on shore, and the daring mariners for whom the deep had had no terrors.

In the hollow of the old oak pile the opals remained all winter long, lying like bird's eggs in a nest, whilst the restless waters washed and swirled above its sanctuary. The worn stump of the wood had kept its place for centuries, and many a corpse had drifted past it outward to the sea in days when the white

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marbles of St. Mark's city had run red with blood. It had once been the base of a sea-shrine, of a Madonna of the waters to whom the boatmen passing had invoked the Stella Maris Virgine so dear to fishermen and sailors.

But the painted shrine had long disappeared, and only the piece of timber, down underneath the waters, rooted in the sand amongst the ribbon weed and mussels, had had power to resist the forces of tide and tempest.

All the winter long the old wood kept the opals safe and sound. When the cold passed, and the blasts from the Dolomite glaciers softened, and the orchards of the fruit islands were in bud, the opals were still in their hollow, covered from the sea by the bend of the wood above them,

so that, though often wet, they were never washed away.

But one day, when the peach and pear and plum trees had in turn burst into blossom on the isles, and the flocks of gulls who had survived the stress of famine and frost had returned to their feeding-places on the outer lagoons, a large iron ship coming from the Black Sea gave a rude shock in passing to the old oak pile; the top of it under the blow parted and fell asunder; the necklace was washed out of its hiding-place, and, carried in the heavy trough of the steamer's path, was floated nearer to the isles, farther from the city. It became entangled with some algæ, and, rocked on the weed as on a little raft, was borne to and fro by a strong wind rushing from the north-east, and so was driven round past San Cristoforo

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and Burano, and was finally carried ashore up the creeks into the long grasses and reeds beneath the Devil's Bridge at Torcello. The yellow water iris was then flowering, and two little reed warblers were nesting amongst the flags, as the opals were drifted up under some hemlock leaves and there rested.

"I think they are eggs, but they are all strung together," said the warbler to his mate.

"They look more like the spawn of a fish," said the little winged lady, with scorn.

A water-rat came up and smelt at them, then went away disdainfully ; they were not good to eat. For birds and beasts do not care for jewels : it is only humanity, which thinks itself superior to them, which sees any value in stones, and calls such toys precious.



### III.

**H**E devil is credited with building many bridges on the earth ; it is hard to know why he should have done so, since waters however wide cannot possibly have been an obstacle in his own path.

But Devil's Bridges there are, from the Hebrides to the Isles of Greece ; the Devil's Bridge at Torcello has been so called from the height and breadth of its one arch, but there is nothing diabolic or infernal in its appearance ; it is of old brick made beautiful in its hues by age, and

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has many seeding grasses and weeds growing in its crevices. Its banks are rich in grass; in flags, in sea lavender, and about it grow hazel trees and pear trees.

There is nowhere in the world any grass richer than that of Torcello, and forget-me-nots, honeysuckle, and wild roses grow down to the water's edge and around the hoary stones of the deserted isle.

"What a God-forgotten place!" said a young man as he sprang from a boat on to the bank by the bridge.

"Torcello was the mother of Venice; the daughter has slain her," replied an older man as he laid down his oars in the boat, and prepared to follow his companion.

His foot trod amongst the hemlock leaves and was en-

tangled by them ; he stooped, and his eyes, which were very keen, caught sight of the string of opals.

"A woman's necklace !" he said, as he drew it out from under the salt seaweed, and the dewy dock leaves. It was discoloured, and had sand and mud on it, and bore little traces of its former beauty ; but he recognised that it was a jewel of worth ; he perceived, even dulled as they were, that the stones were opals.

"What have you there ?" cried the younger man from above on the bank. "The skull of an Archimandrite ?"

The other threw the necklace up on to the grass.

"You would have been a fitter finder of a woman's collar than I am."

"Opals ! The stones of sor-

row ! ” said the younger man, gravely, as he raised it and brushed off the sand. “ It has been beautiful,” he added. “ It will be so again. It is not really hurt, only a little bruised and tarnished.”

The necklace interested him ; he examined it minutely as the sun shone on the links of dimmed gold. It awakened in him an image of the woman who might have possessed and worn it.

“ What will you do with it ? ” he said to his companion, who had mounted on to the bank after securing the boat.

“ What does one always do with things found ? Send them to the police, I believe.”

“ Oh you Goth ! ” said the younger. “ Let us spend our lives in discovering the owner.”

“ You can spend yours so if

you like, Prince. Mine is already in bond to a severer mistress."

"Lend me your glass," said the younger man; the glass was of strong magnifying power; when it was handed to him he looked through it at some little marks on the back of the clasp of the opal collar. "Zaranegra 1770," he read aloud. "Zaranegra is a Venetian name."

There was an inscription so minute that to the unaided eye it was invisible; through the glass it was possible to read it. It was this:

NINA DELLA LUCEDIA

CONTESSA ZARANEGRA

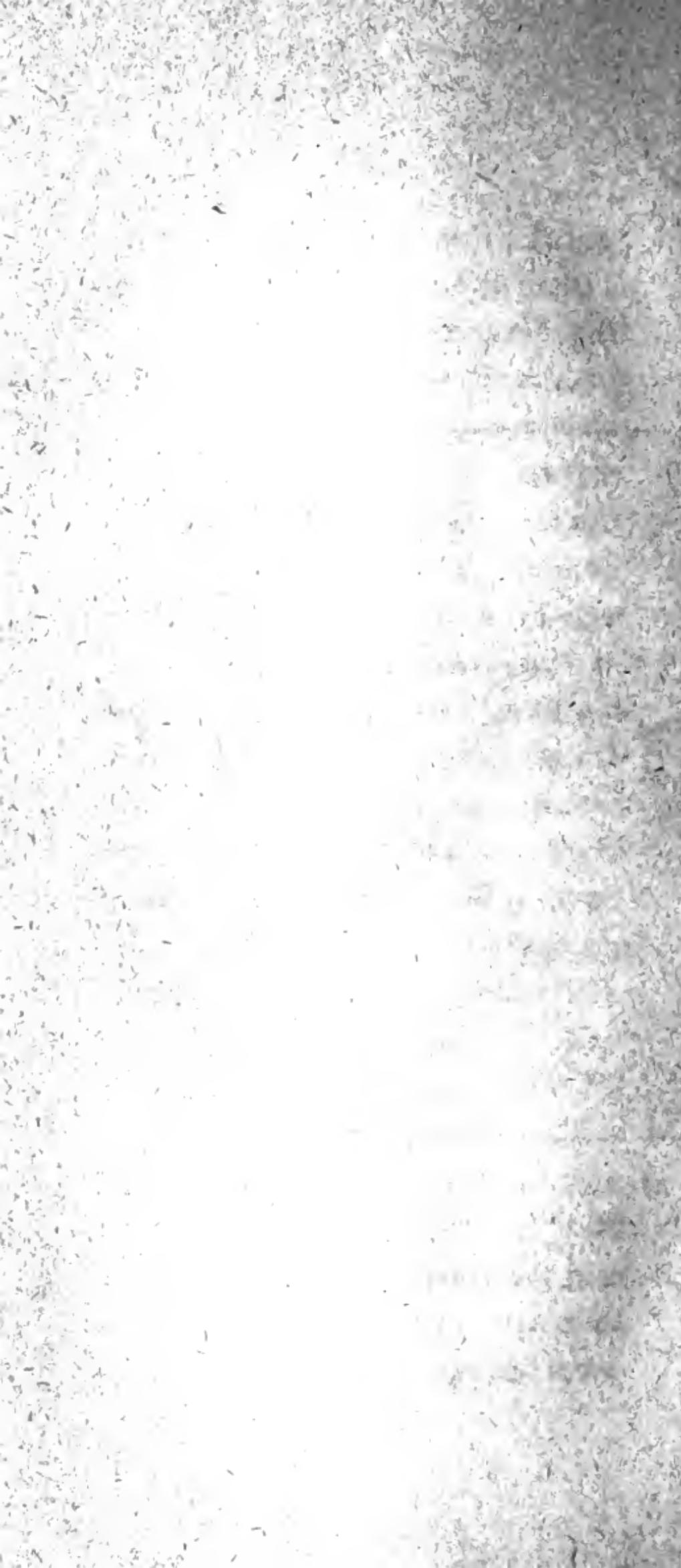
*Capo d'Anno*

1770.

"Zaranegra!" repeated the younger man. "That is a Venetian name. Lucedia is a name



"Lend me your glass," said the younger man. The glass was of strong magnifying power; when it was handed to him he looked through it at some little marks on the back of the clasp of the opal collar.



of the Marches of Ancona. There is a Ca' Zaranegra on the Grand Canal. It is next to the Loredà. You admired its Moorish windows on the second storey this morning. Carlo Zaranegra died young; he left a widow who is only twenty now. She is a daughter of the Duke of Monfalcone; a family of the Trentino, but pure Italians in blood. Their place is in the mountains above Gorizia. It must be she who owns this necklace, an heirloom probably."

"Take it to her," said the finder of it, with indifference.  
"I cede you my rights."

The younger laughed.

"Ah! who knows what they may become?"

"Whatever they may become they are yours. I do not appreciate that kind of reward."

"Really?" said the younger man. "If so I pity you!"

"Nay, I pity you," said the elder.

The young man still stood with the opals in his hands; with a wisp of grass he had cleared the sand in a measure off them; the pearly softness and the roseate flame of the stones began to show here and there; two alone of their number were missing.

"Come," said his companion, with impatience. "Put that broken rubbish in your pocket and let us go and see the Cathedral and S. Fosca, for it will soon grow dark."

They walked along the dyke of turf which traverses the isle, past the low fruit trees and the humble cabins of the few peasants who dwell there; the grass was long and full of ox-eyed daisies, and purple loosestrife,

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and pink campion. They soon reached the green and quiet place where the sacred buildings of S. Maria and S. Fosca, stand in the solitude of field and sea.

They entered first of all the old church of S. Fosca. The younger man went straight to the altar with uncovered head and knelt before it, a soft and serious look upon his face as his lips moved.

The elder cast a glance, contemptuous and derisive, on him, and turned to look at the five arcades, with their columns, so precious to those who understand the laws of architecture.

He was learned in many things, and architecture and archæology were the studies which were to him pastimes, in the rare hours of recreation which he allowed himself.

“Have you prayed to find the

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mistress of the opals?" he said to the younger man who, risen from his knees, approached him, a red light of the late afternoon slanting in from an upper window in the apse and falling on his bright hair and beautiful classic face.

The young man coloured.

"I prayed that the stones may bring us no evil," he said, with ingenuous simplicity. "Laugh as you will, a prayer can never do harm, and you know opals are stones of sorrow."

"I know you are a credulous child—a superstitious peasant—though you are twenty-four years old and have royal and noble blood in your veins."

"If you had not saved my life I would throw you into the sea," replied the other, half in jest half in anger. "Leave my faiths alone. Lead your own barren

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life as you choose, but do not cut down flowers in the garden of others."

"Life is truly a garden for you," said the elder man, with a touch of envy in the tone of his voice.

It was dusk in S. Fosca for the day was far advanced, and the sun was setting without beyond the world of waters.

Two peasant women were saying their aves before low burning lamps. The scent of the grass and the smell of the sea came in through the open door. A cat walked noiselessly across the altar. As the church was now so it had been a thousand years earlier.

"Does this place say nothing to you?" asked the younger man.

"Nothing," replied the other.  
"What should it say?"



#### IV.

HEN the young Sicilian prince, Lionello Adri-anis, head of an ancient Hispano-Italian family, had met with a hunting accident, and the tusks of an old boar had brought him near to death, an English surgeon, by name Frederic Damer, who was then in Palermo, did for him what none of the Italian surgeons dared to do, and, so far as the phrase can ever be correct of human action, saved his life. A year had passed since then; the splendid vitality of the Sicilian

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had returned to all its natural vigour ; he was only twenty-four years of age and naturally strong as a young oak in the woods of Etna. But he had a mother who loved him, and was anxious ; she begged the Englishman to remain awhile near him ; the Sicilian laughed but submitted ; he and Damer had travelled together in Egypt and India during several months, and were now about in another month to part company ; the Sicilian to return to his own people, the Englishman to occupy a chair of physiology in a town of northern Europe.

Their lives had been briefly united by accident and would have parted in peace : a collar of opals was by chance washed up amongst the flags and bur-docks of Torcello and the shape of their fate was altered.

With such trifles do the gods play when they stake the lives of men on the game.

Damer was the son of a country physician, but his father had been poor, the family numerous and he, a third son, had been sent out into the world with only his education as his capital. He practised surgery to live; he practised physiology to reach through it that power and celebrity for which his nature craved and his mental capacity fitted him. But at every step his narrow means galled and fretted him, and he had been a demonstrator, an assistant, a professor in schools, when his vast ability and relentless will fitted him for the position of a Helmholtz or a Virchow in that new priesthood which has arisen to claim the rule of mankind, and sacrifices to itself all sentient races.

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In Adrianis he saw all the powers of youth and of wealth concentrated in one who merely used them for a careless enjoyment and a thoughtless good nature, which seemed, to himself, as senseless as the dance in the sun of an amorous negro.

Adrianis and the whole of his family had shown him the utmost gratitude, liberality, and consideration, and the young prince bore from him good-humouredly sarcasms and satires which he would not have supported from an emperor; but Damer in his turn felt for the Sicilian and his people nothing but the contempt of the great intellect for the uncultured mind, the irritation of the wise man who sees a child gaily making a kite to divert itself out of the parchments of a treatise in an unknown tongue which,

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studied, might have yielded up to the student the secret of perished creeds and of lost nations. There is no pride so arrogant, no supremacy so unbending, as those of the intellect. It may stand, like Belisarius, a beggar at the gate; but like Belisarius it deems itself the superior of all the crowds who drop their alms to it, and while it stretches out its hand to them its lips curse them.





## V.

HEY went, without visiting the basilica, back to Venice in the twilight which deepened into night as they drew near the city; the moon was high and the air still. They dined in the spacious rooms set aside in the hotel for the young prince. When the dinner was over Adrianis rose.

“ Will you come ? ” he asked.

“ Where ? ” asked Damer.

“ To the Ca’ Zaranegra,” he replied, with a boyish laugh.

"Not I," replied Damer.

"A rivederci, then," said Adrianis.

But he lingered a moment.

"It will not be fair to you," he said, "for me to take the credit of having found this necklace."

"Whatever honour there may be in the salvage I cede it, I tell you, willingly."

"Of course I shall tell her that it was you."

"There is no need to do so; I am not a squire of dames. She will prefer a Sicilian Prince to a plain man of science. However, you must find the lady first. The true owner lies under some mossgrown slab in some chapel crypt, no doubt."

"Why will you speak of death? I hate it."

"Hate it as you may it will overtake you. Alexander hated

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it, but still ! When we shall have found the secret of life we may perhaps find the antidote to death. But that time is not yet."

He looked at his companion as he spoke, and thought what he did not speak :

" Yes ; strong as you are, and young as you are, and fortunate as you are, you too will die like the pauper and the cripple and the beggar ! "

The reflection gratified him ; for of the youth, of the beauty, of the fortune, he was envious, and with all his scorn of higher intellect he despised the childlike, happy, amorous temperament, and the uncultured mind which went with them.

" If I had only his wealth," he thought often. " Or if he only had my knowledge ! "

" When we shall have pene-

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trated the secret of life we shall perhaps be able to defy death," repeated Adrianis. "What use would that be? You would soon have the world so full that there would be no standing room; and what would you do with the choking multitudes?"

"I never knew you so logical," said the elder man, contemptuously. "But have no fear. We are far enough off the discovery; when it is made it will remain in the hands of the wise. The immortality of fools will never be contemplated by science."

"The wise will not refuse to sell the secret to the wealthy fools," thought his companion, but he forbore to say so. He was generous of temper, and knew that his companion had both wisdom and poverty.

A few seconds later the splash of the canal water beneath the

balcony told the other that the gondola was moving.

"What a child!" thought Damer, with impatient contempt; he turned up the light of his reading lamp, opened a number of the French *Journal de Physiologie*, and began to read, not heeding the beauty of the moonlit marbles of the Salvatore in front of him, or listening to the song from Mignon which a sweet-voiced lad was singing in a boat below. He read on thus in solitude for three hours; the great tapestried and gilded room behind him, the gliding water below; the beautiful church in front of his balcony, the laughter, the music, the swish of oars, the thrill of lutes and guitars, all the evening movement on the canal as the crowds went to and fro the Piazza, not disturbing him from his studies of which every now

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and then he made a note in pencil in a pocket-book.

It was twelve o'clock when, into the empty brilliantly lighted room, Adrianis entered and came across it to where Damer sat on the balcony.

"I have found her!" he said, with joyous triumph. The moonlight shone on his dark, starry eyes, his laughing mouth, his tall figure, full of grace and strength like the form of the Greek Hermes in the Vatican.

Damer laid aside his papers with impatience.

"And she has welcomed you, apparently? It is midnight, and you look victorious."

Adrianis made a gesture of vexed protestation.

"Pray do not suspect such things. I sent in my card and begged her major-domo to say that I had found her necklace.

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She sent word for me to go upstairs that she might thank me. Of course my name was known to her. She had a duenna with her. It was all solemn and correct. She was enchanted to find her necklace. It was an heirloom which Zaranegra gave her. He was killed in a duel, as I told you, two years ago. She is very beautiful and looks twenty years old, even less. I was very honest ; I told her that an Englishman who was travelling with me had enjoyed the honour of finding the opals ; and she wishes to see you to-morrow. I promised to take you *in prima sera* ; you surely ought to be grateful."

Damer shrugged his shoulders and looked regretfully at his papers and pencils.

"Women only disturb one," he said, ungraciously.

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Adrianis laughed.

"It is that disturbance which perfumes our life and shakes the rose leaves over it. But I remember, to attract you a woman must be lying, dead or alive, on an operating-table."

"Alive by preference," said Damer. "The dead are little use to us; their nervous system is still, like a stopped clock."

"A creature must suffer to interest you?"

"Certainly."

Adrianis shuddered slightly.

"Why did you save me?"

Damer smiled.

"My dear prince, it is my duty to save when I can. I should have preferred to let you alone, and study your natural powers of resistance in conflict with the destruction which was menacing them. But I could

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not follow my preferences. I was called in to assist your natural powers by affording them artificial resistance; and I was bound to do so."

Adrianis made a grimace which signified disappointment and distaste.

"If my mother knew you looked at it in that way she would not adore you, my friend, as she does."

"The princess exaggerates," said Damer, putting out his lamp. "Mothers always do; I do not think I ever said anything to lead her to deceive herself with regard to me. She knows what my interests and my pursuits are"

"But," said Adrianis, wistfully, "surely there are many men of science, many surgeons, whose desire is to console, to amend, who care for the poor

human material on which they work?"

"There are some," replied Damer; "but they are not in the front ranks of their profession, nor will science ever owe much to them."

The young man was silent; he felt in his moral nature as he had sometimes felt in his physical, when a chill icy wind had risen and passed through the sunshine of a balmy day. He shook off the impression with the mutability of a happy temper.

"Eh via!" he cried. "You make me feel cold in the marrow of my bones. Good-night. I am tired, and I go to dream of the lady of the opals. Like you, I prefer living women to dead ones, but I do not wish them to suffer. I wish them to enjoy—for my sake and their own!"

Damer, left alone, relit his

lamp, took up his papers and books, went into the room, for the night was fresh, and remained reading and writing until daybreak.





## VI.

**V**ERONICA ZARANE-GRA was charmed to find her necklace; she was still more charmed to find an adventure through it.

This beautiful youth with his starry eyes, soft with admiration, who had brought her back the opals, looked like a knight out of fairyland. She was young; she was weary of the seclusion of her widowhood; she was kept in close constraint by those who had authority over her; she was ready to re-enter life in its enjoyments, its amusements, its affec-





She was like a picture of Caterina Cornaro as she stood on the balcony of her house ; her golden hair was enclosed in a pearl-sown net, she had some crimson carnations at her throat, and her cloak of red satin, lined with sables, lay on her shoulders and fell to her feet like the robes of a Dogaressa.

tions, its desires. The tragic end of her husband had impressed and saddened her, but she had recovered from its shock. The marriage had been arranged by their respective families, and the hearts of neither had been consulted. Zaranegra, however, had become much in love with her, and had left her all which it was in his power to leave, and that had been much.

She was like a picture of Caterina Cornaro as she stood on the balcony of her house; her golden hair was enclosed in a pearl-sown net, she had some crimson carnations at her throat, and her cloak of red satin lined with sables lay on her shoulders and fell to her feet like the robes of a Dogarella.

The balcony was filled with spiraea, whose white blossoms were like snow about her in

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the starlight and lamplight as the gondola which brought the Sicilian prince and his companion to her palace paused below at the water-stairs.

“ How clever it was of you to see my opals under the grass and the sand ! ” she said, a few moments later, as Adrianis presented Damer in the long, dim room hung with tapestries and rich in bronzes, marbles, pictures, and mosaics.

She threw her cloak on a couch as she spoke ; she was dressed in black, but the gauze sleeves of the gown showed her fair arms, and the bodice was slightly open on her bosom ; her face was bright like a rose above the deep shadow of the gown ; her hair had been a little ruffled by the wind of the evening as she had stood on the balcony.

"Madame," said Damer, as he bowed to her with a strange and unwelcome sense of embarrassment, "Prince Adrianis should not have told you that I had such good fortune. I am no fit squire of dames: he is."

"But how came you to see them, all dull and muddy as they were?"

"Sight is a matter of training; I use my eyes. Most people do not use theirs."

She looked at him curiously and laughed. The answer seemed to her very droll.

"Everybody sees except the blind," she said, somewhat puzzled.

"And the purblind," added Damer.

She did not catch his meaning. She turned from him a little impatiently and addressed Adrianis.

She spoke of music. Adrianis was accomplished in that art ; there was a mandoline lying on the grand piano ; he took it up and sang to it a Sicilian love-song ; she took it from him and sang Venetian barcarolle and stornelli ; then they sang together, and their clear, youthful voices blent melodiously. People passing on the canal stopped their gondolas under the balcony to listen ; some Venetian professional musicians in a boat below applauded. Damer sat in the shadow, and listened, and looked at them. Music said little or nothing to him ; he had scarcely any comprehension of it ; but something in the sound of those blended voices touched a chord in his nature ; made him feel vaguely sad, restlessly desirous, foolishly irritated. The light fell on the handsome head of



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the youth, on the carnations at the lady's throat, on the rings on their hands, which touched as they took the mandoline one from the other; behind them were the open casement, the balcony with its white flowers, the lighted frontage of a palace on the opposite side of the canal.

As they ceased to sing the people below on the water applauded again, and cried, "Brava ! brava ! Bis, bis ! "

Adrianis laughed and rose, and, going out on to the balcony, threw some money to the boat-load of ambulant musicians who had left off their playing and singing to listen.

"Those artists below are very kind to us amateurs," said Adrianis, with a little branch of spiræa in his hand, which he proceeded to fasten in his button-

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hole as he came back into the light of the room.

" You are more than an amateur."

" Oh, all Sicilians sing. The syrens teach us."

" Prince Adrianis is a poet," said Damer, with a harsh tone in his voice.

" Who never wrote a verse," said Adrianis, as he handed a cup of coffee to his hostess.

" Shut the windows," said the Countess Zaranegra to her servants, who brought on coffee and wine, lemonade and syrups.

Through the closed windows the sound of a chorus sung by the strolling singers below came faintly and muffled into the room ; the lamplight shone on the white spray of the spiraea in his coat, which looked like a crystal of snow.

" If I had found the opals I

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should have been inspired by them," he added. "As it is, I am dumb and unhappy."

Veronica Zaranegra smiled.

"If you are dumb, so was Orpheus."

"And if you are unhappy so was Prince Fortunatus," added Damer. "You are only sad out of wantonness because the gods have given you too many gifts."

"Or because he has stolen a piece of spiræa."

"I may keep my theft?" asked Adrianis.

"Yes. For you brought back the opals, though you did not find them."

Soon after they both took their leave of her and went down to the waiting gondola. The boat-load of musicians had drifted upwards towards Rialto, the colours of their paper lanthorns glowing through the dark. There

was no moon. They did not speak to each other in the few minutes which carried them to their hotel. When they reached it they parted with a brief good-night. Neither asked the other what his impressions of the lady, and of the evening, had been.

The night was dark. Mists obscured the stars. The lights at the Dogana and of the lamps along the Schiavone were shining brightly, and many other lights gleamed here and there, where they shone in gondolas, or boats, or at the mast-heads of vessels anchored in the dock of St. Mark. The hour was still early; eleven o'clock and the canal was not yet deserted. There was the liquid sound of parting water as people went to and fro on its surface. At such an hour Venice is still what it was in the days of

Paul Veronese, or of Virginia di Leyva.

Adrianis sat by the sea-wall of the hotel garden and looked absently down the dark expanse studded with lights like diamonds, and thought exclusively of the woman he had quitted. He saw her golden hair shining in the lamplight, the red of the knot of carnations at her throat, the slender, jewelled hand on the mandoline, the smiling, rose-like mouth; he heard the clear, fresh, unstrained voice rising and falling with his own, whilst her eyes smiled and her eyes met his.

“Stones of sorrow! stones of sorrow!” he thought. “No, no. They shall be jewels of joy to me, to her. Love is born of a glance, of a note, of a murmur. It is the wonder flower of life. It blossoms full-grown in an instant.

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It needs neither time nor reflection."

His heart beat gladly in him : his nerves were thrilled and throbbing ; his welcome of a new and profound emotion was without fear.

In such a mood the merest trifle has eloquence. He was sorry when he looked down on the spray of spiraea in his coat, and saw that all the little starry flowers of it had fallen off, and vanished, as though it had indeed been snow which had melted at a breath of scirocco.





## VII.

WO weeks passed, and brought the month of May. On the many island banks long sprays of dog-rose and honeysuckle hung down over the water, and the narrow canals which ran through them were tunnels of blossom and verdure ; on the sunny shallows thousands of white-winged gulls were fishing and bathing all the day long ; and in the churches azaleas and lilies and arums were grouped round the altars under the dark-winged angels of Tintoretto and

the golden-haired cherubim of Tiepolo.

The nights were still cold but the days were warm, were at noontide even hot; and Veronica Zaranegra passed almost all her time on the water. There was a little orchard island which belonged to the family, out beyond Mazzorbo; in the previous century a small summer-house or pavilion, with a red-tiled dome like a beehive, had been erected on it and was still there; a pretty toy still, though its frescoed walls were faded and its marble landing steps eaten away by the incessant washing of the sea; it was embowered in peach and plum and pear trees, and looked westward. Here she came often for breakfast, or for afternoon tea, or the evening merenda of fruit sweetmeats and wine, and here she was often

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accompanied by a gay party of Venetians of her own years and by the two strangers who had given her back her opals. The weather was rainless and radiant; the gondolas glided like swallows over the lagoons; she was rich, childlike, fond of pleasure; she tried to bring back the life of the eighteenth century, and amused herself with reviving its customs, its costumes, its comedies, as they had been before the storms of revolution and the smoke of war had rolled over the Alps, and Arcole and Marengo had silenced the laughter of Italy.

“I wish I had lived when this collar was new,” she said, when her jewellers returned to her the opals restored to their pristine brilliancy. “Life in Venice was one long festa then; I have read of it. It was all masque, and

serenade, and courtship, and magnificence. People were not philosophical about life then; they lived. Nina Zaranegra was a beautiful woman. They have her portrait in the Belle Arte. She holds a rose to her lips and laughs. She was killed by her husband for an amour. She had these opals on her throat when he drove the stiletto through it. At least so Carlo used to tell me. But perhaps it was not true."

"Do not wear them," said Adrianis, to whom she was speaking. "Do not wear them if they are blood-stained. You know they are stones of sorrow."

She laughed.

"You Sicilians are superstitious. We northerners are not. I like to wear them for that very reason of their tragedy."

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She took up the necklace and clasped it round her throat; some tendrils of her hair caught in the clasp; she gave an involuntary little cry of pain. Adrianis hastened to release her hair from the clasp. His hand trembled; their eyes met, and said much to each other. Damer, who was near, drew nearer.

"I have seen the portrait in the Belle Arte," he said. "The Countess Nina symbolises silence with her rose, but she has the face of a woman who would not keep even her own secrets. Indeed a charming woman is always '*bavarde comme les pies*,' as the French say."

"You despise women," said Veronica Zaranegra, with vexation.

"Oh, no. But I should not give them my confidence any more than I should give a deli-

cate scientific instrument to a child."

"Not even to a woman whom you loved?"

"Still less to a woman whom I loved."

"You are a mysterious sage," she said, a little impatiently. "You regard us as if we were children indeed, incapable of any comprehension."

Damer did not dispute the accusation.

"Did I hear you say," he asked, "that the lovely original of that portrait was murdered by her husband?"

"Yes, and he would not even allow her Christian burial, but had her body carried out on to the Orfano canal, and thrown into the water, with a great stone tied to her feet."

"He was primitive," said Damer. "Those are rough, rude ways of vengeance."

"What would you have done?"

"I hardly know; but I should not have so stupidly wasted such a beautiful organism. Besides the end was too swift to be any great punishment."

She was silent, looking at him with that mixture of curiosity, interest, and vague apprehension which he always aroused in her. She was not very intelligent, but she had quick susceptibilities; there was that in him which alarmed them and yet fascinated them.

"He awes me," she said later in the day to Adrianis. "So often one cannot follow his meaning, but one always feels his reserve of power."

It was a grave speech for a light-hearted lover of pleasure. Adrianis heard it with vexation, but he was loyal to the man who, as he considered, had saved his life.

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"He is a person of great intellect," he answered; "we are pygmies beside him. But——"

"But what?"

"He used his brains to cure my body. So I must not dispute the virtue of his use of them. Yet sometimes I fancy that he has no heart. I think all the forces in him have only nourished his mind, which is immense. But his heart, perhaps, has withered away, getting no nourishment. He would say I talk nonsense; but I think you will understand what I mean."

"I think I understand," said Veronica, thoughtfully.

She had thought very little in her careless young life; she had begun to think more since these two men had come into it.

"Adrianis merits better treatment than you give him," said her duenna to her that day.

"How long will you keep him in suspense? You ought to remember 'what hell it is in waiting to abide.'"

"A hell?" said Veronica, with the colour in her face. "You mean a paradise!"

"A fool's paradise, I fear," replied the elder woman. "And what does that other man do here? He told me he was due at some university in Germany."

"How can I tell why either of them stays?" said Veronica, disingenuously as her conscience told her. "Venice allures many people, especially in her spring season."

"So does a woman in her spring," said the elder lady, drily, with an impatient gesture.

"You are angry with me," said Veronica, mournfully.

"No, my dear. It is as useless to be angry with you as to

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be angry with a young cat because in its gambols it breaks a vase of which it knows nothing of the preciousness."

Veronica Zaranegra did not resent or reply. She knew the vase was precious ; she did not mean to break it ; but she wanted to be free awhile longer. Mutual love was sweet, but it was not freedom. And what she felt ashamed of was a certain reluctance which moved her to allow Damer to see or know that she loved a man of so little intellectual force as Adrianis, a man who had nothing but his physical beauty and his gay, glad temper and kind heart.

"Do you want nothing more than these ?" the gaze of Damer seemed in her imagination to say to her.

She was angered with herself for thinking of him or of his

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opinion ; he was not of her world or of her station ; he was a professional man, a worker, a teacher ; natural pride of lineage and habit made her regard him as in no way privileged to be considered by her. And yet she could not help being influenced by that disdain of the mental powers of others which he had never uttered, but which he continually showed. Indecision is the greatest bane of women ; obstinacy costs them much, but indecision costs them more. The will of Veronica flickered like a candle in the wind, veered hither and thither like a fallen leaf in a gust of wind and rain.

Adrianis was delightful to her ; his beauty, his gaiety, and his homage were all sympathetic to her. She knew that he loved her, but she prevented him telling

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him so ; she liked her lately acquired liberty ; she did not want a declaration which would force her to decide in one way or another what to do with her future. And she was affected without being aware of it by the scarcely disguised contempt which his companion had for him. It was seldom outspoken, but it was visible in every word of Damer, in every glance.

"He is beautiful, yes," he said once to her. "So is an animal."

"Do you not like animals?"

"I do not like or dislike them. The geologist does not like or dislike the stones he breaks up, the metallurgist does not like or dislike the ore he fuses."

She did not venture to ask him what he meant ; she had a vague conception of his meaning, and it gave her a chill as such replies

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gave to Adrianis : a chill such as the north wind, when it comes down from the first snows on the Dolomite peaks, gives to the honeysuckle flowers hanging over the sea-walls. She was not clever or much educated, but she had seen a good deal of the world, and she had heard men talk of science, of its pretensions and its methods, its self-worship and its tyrannies. She had put her rosy fingers in her ears and run away when they had so spoken, but some things she had heard and now remembered.

" You are what they call a physiologist ? " she said once, suddenly.

" I am," replied Damer !

She looked at him under her long silky lashes as a child looks at what it fears in the dusk of a fading day. He attracted her and repelled her, as when she

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had herself been a little child she had been at once charmed and frightened by the great ghostly figures on the tapestries, and the white and grey busts of gods and sages on the grand staircase of her father's house in the Trentino. She would have liked to ask him many things, things of mystery and of horror, but she was afraid. After all, how much better were the sea, the sunshine, the dog-rose, the barcarolle, the laughter, the lute !

She turned to Adrianis, who at that moment came along the sands of the beach, his hands filled with spoils from the blossoming hedges ; turned to him as when, a little child on the staircase in the dusk, she had run to reach the shelter of a warmed and lighted room. He was of her own country, her own age, her own temperament ; he

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carried about him a sense of gladness, an atmosphere of youth ; he was of her own rank ; he was as rich as she, and richer. There was no leaven of self-seeking in the love he bore her ; the passion she had roused in him was pure of any alloy ; it was the love of the poets and the singers. If she accepted it, her path, from youth to age, would be like one of those flower-ing meadows of his own Sicily which fill the cloudless day with perfume.

She knew that ; her foot was ready to tread the narcissus-filled grass, but by an unaccountable indecision and caprice she would not let him invite her thither. She continually evaded or eluded the final words which would have united them or parted them.

Again and again, when that

moment of decision could not have been postponed, the sombre shadow of Damer had appeared, as in the moment when the clasp of the necklace had been entangled in the little curls at the back of her throat.

It might be chance, it might be premeditation; but he was always there in those moments when the heart of Adrianis leaped to his eyes and lips and called to hers.





## VIII.

**N** the evening she was usually at home. She did not as yet go to balls or theatres; the aristocratic society of Venice flocked to her rooms, and what was best in the foreign element. In the evenings neither Adrianis nor Damer saw her alone; but in the daytime, on the island or in the water excursions, sometimes one or the other was beside her for a few minutes with no listener near.

Adrianis eagerly sought such occasions ; Damer never seemed to seek them. He was often in her palace and on her island, but appeared to be so chiefly because he went where Adrianis went. No one could have told that he took pleasure in doing so.

But Adrianis, somewhat surprised at his lingering so long, thought to himself : "He was to be in Gottenberg by the 10th of May, and it is now the 23rd."

"Have you given up your appointment ?" he asked once, directly.

Damer merely answered, "No." He did not offer any explanation ; but he continued to stay on in Venice, though he had removed from the fine apartments occupied by his friend to a house on the Fondamenti Nuovi, where he had hired two chambers.

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Adrianis, who was very generous and had always a grateful and uneasy sense of unrepaid obligation, vainly urged him to remain at his hotel. But Damer, somewhat rudely, refused.

"I cannot pursue any studies there," he replied.

The house he had chosen was obscure and uninviting, standing amidst the clang of coppersmiths' hammers and the stench of iron-foundries in what was once the most patrician and beautiful garden-quarter of Venice, but which is now befouled, blackened, filled with smoke, and clamour, and vileness, where once the rose-terraces and the clematis-covered pergole ran down to the lagoon, and the marble stairs were white as snow under silken awnings.

"What do you do there?" Veronica Zaranegra wished to

ask him ; but she never did so ; she felt vaguely afraid as a woman of the Middle Age would have feared to ask a magician what he did with his alembics and his spheres.

Although the eyes of lovers are proverbially washed by the collyrium of jealousy, those of Adrianis were blind to the passion which Damer, like himself, had conceived. The reserve and power of self-restraint in Damer were extreme, and served to screen his secret from the not very discerning mind of his companion. Moreover, the pride of race which was born and bred in Adrianis rendered it impossible for him to suspect that he possessed a rival in one who was, however mentally superior, so far socially inferior, to himself and to the woman he loved.

That a man who was going

to receive a stipend as a teacher in a German university could lift his eyes to Veronica Zaranegra would have seemed wholly impossible to one who had been reared in patrician and conservative tenets. He never noticed the fires which slumbered in the cold wide-opened eyes of his friend and monitor. He never observed how frequently Damer watched him and her when they were together, listened from afar to their conversation, and invariably interrupted them at any moment when their words verged on more tender or familiar themes. He was himself tenderly, passionately, romantically enamoured ; his temper was full of a romance to which he could not often give adequate expression ; his love for her had the timidity of all sincere and nascent passion ; he was pained and

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chafed by the manner in which she avoided his definite declaration of it, but he did not for a moment trace it to its right cause, the magnetic influence which the Englishman had upon her, the hesitation which was given her by vague hypnotic suggestion. If any looker-on had warned him, he would have laughed and said that the days of magic were past.

He himself only counted time by the hours which brought him into her presence on the water, on the island, or in the evening receptions in the palace. He made water-festivals and pleasure-cruises to please her; he had sent for his own sailing yacht from Palermo. The long, light days of late spring and earliest summer passed in a series of ingenious amusements of which the sole scope was to obtain a

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smile from her. Often she did smile, the radiance of youth and of a woman's willingness to be worshipped shining on her fair countenance as the sun shone on the sea. Sometimes also the smile ceased suddenly when, from a distance, her eyes encountered those of Damer.

All that was most delightful in life offered itself to her in the homage of Adrianis: his mother's welcome, his southern clime, his great love, his infinite tenderness and sweetness of temper, his great physical beauty. She longed to accept these great gifts; she longed to feel his arms folded about her and his cheek against hers; and yet she hesitated, she delayed, she avoided, because in the eyes of another man, whom she disliked and feared, she read mockery, disdain, and superiority.

She could not have said what it was that she felt any more than the young spaniel could tell what moves it as it looks up into human eyes, and reads authority in them, and crouches, trembling.

Why did he stay here? she asked herself, this cold, still, irresponsible man, who had nothing in him which was not alien to the youthful and pleasure-loving society in which he found himself, and who was by his own admission already overdue at the university to which he had been appointed.

"Are you not losing time?" she said once to him; "we are so frivolous, so ignorant, so unlike you."

"I never lose time," replied Damer. "An amoeba in a pool on the sand is companion enough for me."

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Seeing that she had no idea of what he meant, he added:

"A man of science is like an artist; his art is everywhere, wherever natural forms exist."

"Or like a sportsman," said Adrianis, who was listening; "his sport is everywhere, wherever there are living things to kill."

"Put it so if you please," said Damer. But he was annoyed; he disliked being answered intelligently and sarcastically by one whom he considered a fool. Whatever Adrianis said irritated him, though it was almost perpetually courteous and simple, as was the nature of the speaker.

Damer read the young man's heart like an open book and he knew that it was wholly filled with the image of Veronica. He had never liked Adrianis; he had no liking for youth or for physical

beauty, or for kindness and sweetness and simplicity of character. Such qualities were not in tune with him ; they were no more to him than the soft, thick fur of the cat in his laboratory, which he stripped off her body that he might lay bare her spinal cord ; the pretty, warm skin was nothing to science—no more than was the pain of the bared nerves.

He had saved the life of Adrianis because it had interested and recompensed him to do so ; he had travelled with him for a year because it suited him financially to do so ; but he had never liked him, he had never been touched by any one of the many generous and delicate acts of the young man, nor by the trust which the mother of Adrianis continually expressed in her letters to himself. Where

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jealousy sits on the threshold of the soul, goodness and kindness and faith knock in vain for admittance. Envy is hatred in embryo; and only waits in the womb of time for birth.





## IX.



ONE day Veronica asked him to go and see an old servant of the Zaranegra household who was very ill and in hospital; they had begged him not to go to the hospital, but he had wished to do so, and had been allowed to fulfil his wish. Damer went to visit him. He found the man at death's door with cancer of the food and air passages.

“If he be not operated on he will die in a week,” said the Englishman.

None of the hospital surgeons dared perform such an operation.

"I will operate if you consent," said Damer.

The surgeons acquiesced.

"Will Biancon recover?" asked Veronica, when he returned and told her on what they had decided.

"In his present state he cannot live a week," replied Damer, evasively.

"Does he wish for the operation?"

"He can be no judge. He cannot know his own condition. He cannot take his own prognosis."

"But it will be frightful suffering."

"He will be under anæsthetics."

"But will he recover?"

"Madame, I am not the master of Fate."

"But what is probable?"

"What is certain is that the man will die if left as he is."

He performed the operation next day. The man ceased to breathe as it was ended; the shock to the nervous system had killed him.

When she heard that he was dead she burst into tears.

"Oh! why, oh! why," she said passionately to Damer, later in the day: "why, if you knew he must die, did you torture him in his last moments?"

"I gave him a chance," he replied, indifferently. "Anyhow he would never have survived the operation more than a few weeks."

"Why did you torture him with it then?" said Veronica, indignantly.

"It was a rare, and almost unique, opportunity. I have

solved by it a doubt which has never been solved before, and never could have been without a human subject."

She shrank from him in horror.

" You are a wicked man ! " she said, faintly. " Oh, how I wish, how I wish I had never asked you to see my poor Biancon ! He might have lived ! "

" He would most certainly have died," said Damer, unmoved. " The life of a man at sixty is not an especially valuable thing, and I believe he did nothing all his life except polish your palace floors with beeswax or oil ; I forget which it is they use in Venice."

She looked at him with a mixture of horror and fear.

" But you have killed him ! —and you can jest."

"I did not kill him. His disease killed him," replied Damer, with calm indifference. "And his end has been a source of knowledge. I should wish my own end to be as fruitful."

She shuddered, and motioned to him to leave her.

"Go away, go away, you have no heart, and no conscience."

Damer smiled slightly.

"I have a scientific conscience; it is as good as a moral one, and does better work."

"Why did you bring that man to Venice?" she said to Adrianis some hours later. "He has killed my poor Biancon, and he cares nothing."

"Why do you receive him?" said Adrianis, feeling the reproach unjust. "Cease to receive him. That is very simple. If you banish him he is proud; he will not persist."

"He would not perhaps persist; but he would be revenged," she thought, but she did not say so. Though her life was short, she had learned in it that men are like detonators which you cannot throw against each other without explosion.

Adrianis began to desire the exile of his companion, though his loyalty withheld him from trying to obtain it by any unfair means or unjust attack. He was mortified and disquieted. Why had he not had patience, and waited to carry the opals to the Ca' Zaranegra until the Englishman had been safe on the sea on his way to Trieste? He began to perceive that Damer had an influence on the Countess Veronica which was contrary to his own, and adverse to his interests. He did not attach importance to it, because he saw

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that it was purely intellectual; but he would have preferred that it had not existed. So would she.

It was such an influence as the confessor obtains over the devotee; against which husband, lover, children, all natural ties, struggle altogether in vain.

It is not love; it is alien to love, but it is frequently stronger than love, and casts down the winged god maimed and helpless.

“Pierres de malheur! Pierres de malheur!” she said, as she looked at the opals that night. “Why did you bring that cruel man into my life?”

She might banish him as Adrianis had said, but she felt that she would never have courage to do it. Damer awed her. She felt something of what the poor women in the Salpétri  re had felt, when he had

hypnotised them, and made them believe that they clasped their hands on red-hot iron, or were being dragged by ropes to the scaffold. She strove to resist and conquer the impression, but she was subjugated by it against her will.

She buried her poor old servant that night, and followed the coffin in its gondola in her own, with her men in mourning and the torches burning at the prow.

From the casement of his high tower on the north of the city, which looked over the lagoon towards that island which is now the cemetery of Venice, with its tall mosque-like Campanile and its high sea-walls, Damer saw and recognised her on that errand of respect to the humble dead. He saw also the long-boat of the yacht of Adrianis, laden with flowers, following her gondola

at a little distance, as though its owner were timid and uncertain of welcome. He recognised them both in the evening light, and through his binocular could discern their features, their hands, their garlands, as the torches flamed and the water, roughened by wind, broke against the black sides of her gondola, and the white sides of the boat.

"Two children," he thought, "made for each other, with their flowers and fables and follies! I should do best to leave them together."

Then he shut his window and turned from the sight of the silver water, the evening skies, the gliding vessels.

His work awaited him. Bound on a plank lay a young sheep-dog, which he had bought from a peasant of Mazzorbo

for a franc; he had cut its vocal chords; in his own jargon, had rendered it aphone; he had then cut open its body, and torn out its kidneys and pancreas; it was living; he reckoned it would live in its mute and unpitied agony for twelve hours more—long enough for the experiment which he was about to make.

These were the studies for which he had come to the tower on the Fondamenti.

The clang of hammers and the roar of furnaces drowned the cries of animals which it was not convenient to make aphone; and the people of the quarter were too engrossed in their labours to notice when he flung down into the water dead or half-dead mutilated creatures.



## X.

**A**FTER the death of the serving-man, Biancon, the name of the English scientist and surgeon became known and revered amongst the persons of his own profession in Venice. The poor man had died certainly from the shock to the nerves, but that was of small moment. The operation had been eminently successful, as science counts success. It had been admirably performed, and had, as he had said to Veronica, cleared up a doubt which could not, without

a human subject, have been satisfactorily dissipated. His skill, his manual dexterity, his courage, were themes of universal praise, and more than one rich person of the Veneto entreated his examination, and submitted to his treatment.

Adrianis saw but little of him in the daytime, but most evenings in *prima sera* they met in the Palazzo Zaranegra. There Damer spoke little, but he spoke with effect; and, when he was silent, it seemed to the young mistress of the house that his silence was odiously eloquent, for it appeared always to say to her: "What a mindless creature you are! What a mindless creature you love!"

Sometimes it seemed to her to say more; to say across the length of the lighted, perfumed, flower-filled salon, "And if I

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forbid your mutual passion ? If I prevent its fruition ? ”

Out of his presence she ridiculed these ideas, but in his presence they were realities to her, and realities which alarmed and haunted her.

“ How I wish you had never brought him here—oh, how I wish it ! ” she said once to Adrianis.

They were in the Piazza of St. Mark ; it was late in the evening ; the gay summer crowd was all around them ; the band was playing ; the full moon was above in all her glory ; laughter and gay chatter mingled with the lapping of the water and the splash of oars. In the blaze of light under the colonnades people were supping and flirting and jesting, as though they were still in the days of Goldoni.

“ Are you not a little unjust

to me?" said Adrianis, gently.  
"I could not do otherwise, in common honesty, than tell you that it was not I who had found your opals, and you wished to see and to thank the person who had done so."

"Oh, I know! I know!" she said, with an impatient sigh.  
"Such things are always one's own fault. But he killed Biancon, and his very presence now is painful to me."

"Tell him so."

"I dare not."

"Shall I tell him for you?"

She looked at him with the wistful, alarmed gaze of a frightened child.

"Oh, no, no! He would be offended. He might quarrel with you. No! Pray do not do that."

"His anger has no terrors for me," he said, with a smile.

"But you know what you wish  
is my law for silence as for  
speech."

"Limonate? Fragalone? Ge-  
late? Confetti?" sang a boy,  
pushing against them with his  
tray of summer drinks, ices,  
fruits, and sweetmeats.

"Let us go; it is late; and the  
crowd grows noisy," said her  
duenna.

Adrianis accompanied them  
to their gondola, which was  
in waiting beyond the pillars.  
He did not venture to offer to  
accompany them, for the hour  
was late, and the elder lady,  
herself a Zaranegra, was rigid in  
her construction and observance  
of etiquette. He watched the  
gondola drift away amongst the  
many others waiting there, and  
then turned back to the piazza as  
the two Vulcans on the clock-  
tower beat out on their anvil

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with their hammers the twelve strokes of midnight. He saw amongst the crowd the pale and thoughtful countenance of Damer. Had he heard what the young Countess had said of him? It was impossible to tell from his expression; he was looking up at the four bronze horses, as he sat, with an evening paper on his knee, at one of the little tables, an untouched lemonade standing at his elbow.

"I did not know you were here," said Adrianis. "It is too frivolous a scene for you. Are you longing to dissect the horses of St. Mark's?"

Damer smiled slightly.

"I fear I should find their anatomy faulty. I am no artist, or art critic either, or I should venture to say that I object to their attitude. Arrested mo-

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tion is a thing too momentary to perpetuate in metal or in stone."

Adrianis looked up at the rearing coursers.

"Surely we might as well object to the statue of Colleone because he sits erect and motionless through centuries?"

"No, that is quite another matter. Colleone is at rest. The horses yonder are leaping violently."

"You are too subtle for me! I can only admire. I am an ignorant, you know. Have you been here long?"

"Half an hour."

Had he heard? Adrianis wondered. It was impossible to tell.

"I seldom see you now," he added. "You have become very unsociable."

"I was not aware that I was ever sociable. People much

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occupied cannot be so. You see I have a newspaper and I do not read it; I have a *bevanda* and I do not drink it. I have seen the Contessa Zaranegra and I have not spoken to her."

It seemed that the reply, which was longer and more jesting than was the wont of the speaker, was made with intention.

Adrianis was silent. He wished to tell Damer that his presence was unwelcome to the lady of whom he spoke, but he hesitated; he was afraid to compromise her, to seem to boast of some confidence from her.

"Did you know," he asked in a low tone, "that her poor serving man would die under the knife?"

Damer gave him a cold, contemptuous glance.

"I do not speak on professional

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subjects to laymen," he said, curtly.

"I do not ask you," replied Adrianis, "from the professional point of view. I ask you from that of humanity."

"Humanity does not enter into the question," said Damer, slightly. "I hope you will not regard it as offensive if I ask you to limit yourself to speaking of what you understand."

The blood rose into the cheek of Adrianis, and anger leapt to his lips. He restrained it with effort from utterance. The boundless scorn which Damer never scrupled to show for him was at times very chafing and provocative.

"You know, yourself, nothing of sculpture, you admit," he said, controlling his personal feeling, "and yet you venture to criticise the horses of Lysippus."

"My criticism is sound, and they are not the horses of Lyssippus."

"They may not be. But my criticism is sound too, I think, on your want of humanity towards poor Biancon."

Damer cast an evil and disdainful glance at him.

"With regard," he replied, "to the man Biancon, there could be no question of either cruelty or kindness. These terms do not enter into surgical vocabularies. You are well aware that on the stage no actor could act who felt in any manner the real emotions of his part. In like degree no surgeon could operate who was unnerved by what you call 'humanity' with regard to his patient. There is no more of feeling, or want of feeling, in the operator than in the actor. Is it impossible for you to compre-

hend that? As for yourself, you do not care the least for the dead facchino, you only care because a fair woman who is dear to you has wept."

He spoke with insolence, but with apparently entire indifference. Adrianis coloured with displeasure and self-consciousness. It was the first time that the name of the Countess Zarane-gra had been mentioned between them when out of her presence. It seemed to him an intolerable presumption in Damer to speak of her. But he scarcely knew how to reply. With a man of his own rank he would have quarrelled in such a manner that a sabre duel on the pastures by the Brenta river would have followed in the morning. But Damer was not socially his equal, and was a man to whom a year before he had owed, or had

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thought that he owed, his restoration to health and life.

"I should prefer that you left the name of that lady out of our discourse," he said, in a low tone but with hauteur. "In my world we do not venture to speak of women whom we respect."

Damer understood the reproof and the lesson so conveyed.

"I am not of your world," he said, slightly. "I have no such pretensions. And women are to me but subjects of investigation, like cats—in their bodies, I mean; of their minds and hearts I have no knowledge. I leave such studies to Paul Bourget and you."

Then he rose and walked away towards the end of the piazza, where the opening of the goldsmiths' street of the Merceria leads to the back of the clock-

tower and the network of narrow passages beyond it.

Adrianis did not detain him, but went himself to his gondola and was taken the few yards which parted St. Mark's from his hotel. Sometimes he slept on board his yacht, but sometimes at the hotel, because it was nearer to the Ca' Zaranegra, which he could not see from his windows, but which he knew were there on the bend of the canal towards Rialto.

However, he reflected with consolation, in a week or two more Veronica would go to her father's villa in the mountains of the Trentino, and she had given him to understand that she would tell the duke to invite him. Thither it would be impossible for Damer to go, even if he should desire to do so, which was improbable. For Adrianis

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never suspected the existence of any passion in Damer except the desire of command, the pleasure which the exercise of a strong will over weaker ones gave him from its sense of intellectual dominion.

The words of Damer seemed to him insolent ; but he was used to his insolence, and he did not attribute them to any other feeling than that coldness of heart which was not new to him in the speaker.

To all interference in, or interrogation concerning, his scientific or surgical actions and purposes the Englishman had always replied with the same refusal to permit those whom he called laymen to judge either the deeds or the motives of his priesthood. It was precisely the same kind of arrogance and of inflexible secrecy to which Adrianis had

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been used in the ecclesiastics who had been set over him in his boyhood; the same refusal to be interrogated, the same mystic and unexplained claim of superiority and infallibility.

"If he would only go away!" thought Adrianis, as his gondola glided over the few hundred yards.

For the next few days he and Damer did not meet; he had arranged an excursion to Chioggia, and another to Grado, in which small cruises the Countess Zaranegra and other ladies were on board his schooner. It was beautiful weather; the sea was smooth and smiling; all that wealth could do to make the little voyages delightful was done, and he hoped in the course of them to have some opportunity to force from the lady of his

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thoughts some definite assurance of her acceptance of his love. In this hope he was disappointed.

Damer was not on board the yacht ; but as she saw, over the distant water as they sailed away from Venice, the foundry flames and factory smoke of the Fondamenti, where his tower stood, she shuddered in the hot midsummer noon. It seemed as if even from that distance the eyes of the strange Englishman could see her and lay silence on her lips and terror on her heart. It was but a morbid fancy ; she knew that ; but she could not shake off the impression. Even when far out on the sunlit green waves of the Adriatic, when Venice had long dropped away out of sight, the chilliness and oppression of the hallucination remained with her.

Although she and every one

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else knew that the water-fêtes were solely in her honour and for her pleasure, she continued to accept the homage but to stop short of any actual and decisive words on her own part. Adrianis believed that her heart was his, and he could see nothing in the circumstances of either of them which need cause so much hesitation and doubt. Each was free, each young; each might run to meet happiness half-way, as children run to catch a ripe fruit before it has time to fall to earth, and pluck it, warm with sunlight, or pause, and let it drop ungathered. The position troubled and galled him, but his nature was sanguine and his temper optimistic.

Adrianis returned to the city, not wholly discouraged, but vexed and impatient of continual probation and uncertainty.

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If he could not persuade her to promise herself to him in Venice he would follow her to the hills above Goritz, and there decide his fate. He had little doubt that he would succeed before the summer should have wholly fled.

"It is getting too warm here; let us go to the mountains," said her companion.

"In a few days," she answered. But the days passed, the weeks passed, the temperature grew higher, and she still did not move; and Adrianis stayed also, living chiefly on board his yacht, and Damer still delayed his departure, passing most of his time behind bolted doors in his two chambers on the Fondamenti.

What harm could he do? What harm should he do? He was going to the German university; he would pass out of her existence with the

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steamship which should bear him from the Giudecca to Trieste; he would vanish in the cold, grim, dark north, and she would remain in the sunshine and laughter and mirth of the south. They had nothing in common: could have nothing. He belonged to his ghastly pursuits, his sickening experiments, his merciless ambitions, and she belonged to herself—and another. So she told herself a hundred times, and out of his presence her reasoning served to reassure her. But whenever she saw him a vague, dull fear turned her heart cold. She felt as helpless as the blythe bird feels when suddenly in the flowering meadow, where it has made its nest, it sees a snake come gliding through the grass. The bird trembles, but does not fly away; dares not fly away.

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So she dared not dismiss this man from her house, and had not courage to go herself out of the city, out of reach from his magnetism. Her nerves felt the same cold terror as was felt by those of the Venetian brides who were borne away from the feasting on Castello by the brown arms of the Moorish searavishers. She endeavoured to conceal what she felt, for she was ashamed of her own groundless and harmless fears, but they dulled for her the gaiety, the mirth, the beauty of the summer cruise on the emerald seas.

“ You play with your happiness,” said her duenna, angrily, to her.

“ I do not play, indeed,” she answered, seriously. “ We will go to the hills the day after tomorrow.”



## XI.

**A**DRIANIS went out on the following day to make some purchases of glass and metal work for which one of his sisters had written to him. He thought that when they were completed it would be but courtesy to go and tell Damer that he himself was about to leave the city, and offer him his yacht to go in, if he desired it, to Trieste. Their last words had been chafing and cold. The indulgent kindness of his nature made him wish to part friends with a man to

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whom he considered that he owed his life.

He bade his gondolier steer northwards to the Fondamenti. He had never been to the chambers occupied by Damer in the old watch-tower ; the other had always discouraged all visits ; but now he thought that he had better go there, or he might wholly miss seeing the Englishman again before his departure, for of late Damer had come but rarely to the Ca' Zaranegra. But before he could give the order to his gondolier, in passing the Ponte del Paradiso, a sandalo, in which there was one person alone, fouled his own in the narrow channel, and that solitary person was Damer.

"I was just going to your apartments," cried Adrianis, whilst his gondolier swore loudly

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as his prow grazed the wall of Palazzo Narni.

"I am going to the hospital, and shall not be at home till dark," replied Damer, ungraciously.

"I was coming to tell you," said Adrianis, "that I am about to leave Venice."

"And are going to Goritz, no doubt," said Damer, with a brief smile.

"I may be and I may not," replied Adrianis, in a tone which implied that wherever he chose to go was no business of any one's. "Anyhow, I wished to say that the schooner is entirely at your disposition if you remain here or if you cross to Trieste."

"Thanks. Yachts are rich men's toys for which I have no use," answered Damer, without saying where he was going.

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or what he intended to do.  
“Send yours to her docks in Messina, if you do not require her yourself.”

“You might be a little more polite,” said Adrianis, half angrily, half jestingly. “I should be glad to do you any services.”

“Poor men cannot accept such services.”

“Why do you constantly speak of your poverty? You have intellect; that is much rarer than riches.”

“And much less esteemed,” said Damer, with that brief, icy smile which always depressed and troubled Adrianis. “I fear I cannot stay to gossip,” he added, “I am already rather late for a conference at the hospital with my esteemed Venetian colleague.”

They were about to part,

Damer to pass underneath the bridge, Adrianis to pursue his way to a coppersmith's workshop, when a weak, infantine cry smote on their ears, echoed by other shriller childish voices.

There was a row of barges moored along the wall under the old grim Narni palace which stands just beyond the bridge, with its massive iron-studded doors, unaltered in appearance since the time when Tiziano walked a living presence over the Paradiso, and the sunshine shone on the golden hair of Palma Vecchio's daughter.

Some children were playing on the black barges which were laden with firewood and coal. They were small creatures, half naked in the warm air and sportive as young rabbits; they ran, leaped, climbed the piles of

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fuel, caught each other in mimic wrestling and screamed with glad laughter; there was only one who did not join in the games, a little boy who lay languidly and motionless on some sacks, and watched the sports of others with heavy eyes.

There was no grown man or woman near, there were only the children, and the old palace, like a grey beard with closed eyes; it looked as if it had been shut when Dandolo was young, and had never been opened since; its white statues gazed down over the iron fencing of its garden wall; they, too, were very old.

As the gondola passed under that wall the sporting children growing wilder and more reckless, rushed in their course past and over the little sick boy, and jostled him so roughly that they pushed him over the edge of the

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barge, and he fell, with a shrill cry, into the water. The others, frightened at what had befallen them, gathered together, whimpering and afraid, irresolute and incapable. The fallen child disappeared. The water hereabouts is thick and dark, and sewage flows unchecked into it. It was in that instant of his fall that his cry, and the shrieks of his companions, rose shrilly on the morning silence.

In a second Adrianis sprang from the gondola, dived for the child, who had drifted underneath the barge, and brought him up in his arms. He was a boy of some five years old, with a pretty pale face and naked limbs, his small, curly head fell in exhaustion on the young man's shoulder, his ragged clothes were dripping.

Damer looked at him with professional insight. "That boy

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is ill," he said to Adrianis. " You had better put him out of your arms."

" Poor little man!" said Adrianis, gently, holding the child closer. " What shall we do with him? We cannot leave him here with only these children."

" You are wet through yourself. You must go to your hotel," said Damer.

Adrianis was still standing in the water. At that moment a woman rose up from the cabin of the farthest barge, and came leaping wildly from one barge to another screaming, " The child, the child! my Carlino!"

She was his mother. Adrianis gave him to her outstretched arms, and slipped some money into the little ragged shirt.

" I will come and see how he is in an hour," he said to her,

amidst her prayers and blessings. "He is not well. You must take more care of him; you should not leave him alone."

The child opened his eyes and smiled.

Adrianis stooped and kissed him.

"Go home by yourself. I will stay and see what is the matter with him," said Damer. Adrianis went. Damer, bidding the woman go before him, walked over the barges until he reached the one to which there was attached a rude deck-house, or cabin, in which she and five children lived. There he examined the little boy.

"A sore throat," he said, simply. "I will bring you remedies."

He returned to his sandolo, and went on his way to the hospital conference.

"What is amiss with him?" said Adrianis, later in the day.

"You would have done better to leave him in the canal water," replied Damer. "He is a weak little thing, he has never had any decent food, he will never recover."

"But what is his illness?"

"A sore throat," replied Damer, as he had replied to the mother; and added, "It is what the Faculty call Boulogne sore throat."

They went both to the Ca' Zaranegra that evening. There were several people there; the night was very warm; the tall lilies and palms on the balcony glistened in the light of a full moon; there was music. Veronica held out the lute to Adrianis.

"Will you not sing with me to-night?"

"Alas! You must forgive me.

I am rather hoarse. I have no voice," he answered, with regret.

"I heard of what you did this morning," she murmured, in a low tone. "Your gondolier told mine. Perhaps you have taken a chill. I will go and see the little child to-morrow."

"We will go together," he replied, in the same soft whisper, while his hand touched hers in seeming only to take the lute. Damer saw the gesture where he sat in the embrasure of a window speaking of a frontier question of the hour with a German Minister who was passing through Venice.

When they left the house two or three other men accompanied them on to the water-steps. Warm though the night was, Adrianis shivered a little as he wrapped his overcoat round him. "I could bear my sables," he

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said, as he descended the stairs. Damer looked at him in the moonlight, which was clear as the light of early morning.

“ You should not plunge into sewage water, and embrace little sick beggars,” he said, coldly, as he accompanied one of the Venetian gentlemen whose palace was near the Fondamenti, and who had offered him a seat in his gondola.

Adrianis, refusing the entreaties of his companions to go and sup with them at Florian’s, went to his rooms at the hotel. He had a flood of happiness at the well-springs of his heart, but in his body he felt feverish and cold.

“ It is the sewage water. It got down my throat as I dived,” he thought, recalling the words of his friend. “ I shall sleep this chill off and be well again in the morning.”

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But he did not sleep ; he drank some iced drinks thirstily, and only fell into a troubled and heavy slumber as the morning dawned red over the roofs of Venice, and the little cannon on the Giudecca saluted a new day.

He felt ill when he rose, but he bathed and dressed, and, though he had no appetite for breakfast, went down to his gondola, which he had bidden to be before the hotel at nine o'clock.

At parting from her he had arranged with Veronica that they should go at that hour to see the little child of the Bridge of Paradise.

As he stood on the steps and was about to descend Damer touched him on the arm.

“ You are going to take the Countess Zaranegra to the sick boy ? ”

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"Yes," said Adrianis, with a haughty accent; he did not like the tone of authority in which he was addressed.

"I forbid you to do so, then," said Damer. "She would only see a dead body, and that body infectious with disease."

Adrianis was pained.

"Is the little thing dead?" he said, in a hushed voice. "Dead already?"

"He died twenty minutes ago. He had been ill for three days."

"Poor little pretty thing!" murmured Adrianis. "I am sorry; I will go to the mother."

"You had better go to your bed. You are unwell. You did a foolish act yesterday."

"I am quite well. When I require your advice I will ask it," said Adrianis, impatiently; and he entered his gondola and went to the Ca' Zaranegra.

Damer, standing on the steps of the hotel, looked after him with a gaze which would have killed him could a look have slain.

Her house was bright in the morning radiance, the green water lapping its marbles, the lilies and palms fresh from the night's dew, the doors standing open showing the blossoming acacias in the garden behind.

She came to him at once in one of the smaller salons.

"I am ready," she said, gaily. "Look! I have got these fruits and toys for your little waif."

Then something in his expression checked her gladness.

"What is it?" she asked.

"The child is dead," said Adrianis.

"Oh, how sad!"

She put down the little gifts she had prepared on a table near her; she was tender-hearted and

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quickly moved ; the tears came into her eyes for the little boy whom she had never seen.

Adrianis drew nearer to her.

“Mia cara,” he murmured. “Do not play with me any longer. Death is so near us always. I have told you a hundred times that I love you. I will make you so happy if you will trust to me. Tell me—tell me——”

She was softened by emotion, conquered by the answering passion which was in her ; she did not speak, but her breast heaved, her lips trembled ; she let him take her hands.

“You will be mine—mine—mine !” he cried, in delirious joy.

“I love you,” she answered, in a voice so low that it was like the summer breeze passing softly over the lilies. “Hush ! Leave

me! Go now. Come back at three. I shall be alone."

The doors were open and the windows; in a farther chamber two liveried servants stood; approaching through the ante-room was the figure of the major-domo of the palace.

Adrianis pressed her hands to his lips and left her. He was dizzy from ecstasy, or so he thought, as the busts and statues of the entrance-hall reeled and swam before his sight, and his limbs felt so powerless and nerveless that, if one of his gondoliers had not caught and held him, he would have fallen headlong down the water-steps.





## XII.

HEN three of the clock chimed from the belfries of St. Mark she awaited him, alone in her favourite room, clothed in white with a knot of tea-roses at her breast ; she was full of gladness ; she looked at herself in the many mirrors and saw that she was as fair as the fair June day.

“ How beautiful our lives will be ! ” she thought. “ Poor little dead child ! It was his little hands joined ours. Perhaps he is an angel of God now, and will be always with us ! ”

She heard the swish of oars at the water-stairs below ; she heard

steps ascending those stairs ; she heard the voice of her head servant speaking. It was he ! She put her hand to her heart ; it beat so wildly that the leaves of the roses fell ; she crossed herself and murmured a prayer ; such happiness seemed to merit gratitude.

Through the vista of the ante-chambers came the figure of a man. But it was not that of Adrianis.

Damer came up to her with his calm, expressionless face, his intent eyes, his air of authority and of indifference.

" You expected the Prince Adrianis," he said to her. " I regret to tell you, madame, that he is unable to keep his appointment with you. He has taken the disease of which that child on the barge died this morning. He has what the vulgar call diphtheria."



### XIII.

**A**DRIANIS lay in the large salon where, two months earlier, they had dined together in the evening after finding the opal necklace. Damer had caused a bed to be taken into it and placed in the centre of the room, as affording more air from the four large windows than was to be obtained from the inner bed-chamber adjoining. He did not give the true name to the disease in speaking to the people of the hotel; he spoke merely of cold and fever from a plunge in the hot noonday into foul canal

water ; on the local doctor, whom he paid the compliment of calling in, he enjoined the same reserve.

"The Prince is very rich," he said, "he will pay for any loss which may be incurred, any renewal of furniture and of draperies."

From Adrianis he did not conceal the truth.

Indeed, Adrianis himself said, in a hoarse, faint voice, "I have the disease which the child had. Cure me if you can, for——"

He did not add why life was more than ever beautiful to him, but the tears rose into his eyes ; the other understood what remained unspoken.

When three in the afternoon sounded from the clock-tower on the south side of the hotel he raised his head, and, with a despairing gesture, said to Damer, "She expects me. Go, and

explain to her; say I am ill. Tell her I would get up and keep my tryst if I died at her feet, but I fear—I fear—the contagion—for her."

"Lie where you are and you will probably be well in a few days," said Damer. "I will leave Stefano with you and take your message. I shall soon return. Meanwhile your man knows what to do."

Stefano was the valet.

The eyes of Adrianis followed him from the room with longing and anguish. He was not yet so ill that the apathy of extreme illness dulled his desires and stilled his regrets. Both were intense as life still was intense in him. He would have risen and dragged himself to the Ca' Zaranegra; but, as he had said, he feared the infection for her which would be in his voice,

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in his touch, in his breath, in his mere presence.

He lay on his back gazing wistfully at the great sunny windows, only veiled by the gauze of mosquito curtains. He could hear the churning of the water below as the canal steamers passed up and down; the softer ripple as oars parted it; he could see a corner of the marbles of the Salute, with two pigeons sitting side by side on it pruning their plumage in the sun.

He was not yet afraid, but he was very sorry; he longed to be up and out in the bright air, and he longed to be in the presence of his beloved, to ask again and again and again for the confession so dear to him; to hear it from her lips, to read it in her eyes.

“She loves me, she loves me,”

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he thought, and he, like a coward, like a knave, must be untrue to the first meeting she had promised him !

“ Why is it,” he thought, as the tears welled up under his closed eyelids, “ that our better, kinder impulses always cost us so much more heavily than all our egotisms and all our vices ? ”

If he had left the little child underneath the barge to drown, would it not have been better even for the child ? The little thing had only suffered some eighteen hours longer through his rescue.

“ Let us do what we ought,” he murmured, in words his mother had often spoken to him. “ The gods will pay us.”

But the gods had been harsh in their payment to him.

He counted the minutes until Damer’s return, holding his

watch in his hot hand. He took docilely what his servant gave him, though to swallow was painful and difficult.

"What a while he stays!" he thought, restlessly. He envied the other every moment passed at the Ca' Zaranegra.

"What did you tell her?" he asked, breathlessly, when Damer at last returned.

"I told her the truth," replied Damer, as he placed the thermometer under the sick man's armpit. "You have worried and fretted; your fever has increased."

"What did she say? She is not angry, or offended?"

"Who can be so at the misfortune of disease? Of course she knows that you have incurred this misfortune through your own folly."

"Did she say so?"

"No; I am not aware that

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she said so. But she no doubt thought it. She bade me tell you not to agitate yourself."

"Was that all?"

"She added—for her sake," said Damer, with a cold, slight smile. He was truthful in what he repeated; he scorned vulgar methods of misrepresentation and betrayal. The heavy eyes of Adrianis gleamed and lightened with joy.

"Thanks," he said softly, and his hot hand pressed that of his friend.

"I will write to her," he added. "You can disinfect a note?"

"Yes. But do not exert yourself. Try to sleep."

He crossed the room and closed the green wooden blinds; he gave an order to Stefano, and dipped his hands in a disinfecting fluid; then he sat down and

took up a book. But he could not read. He saw before him that blanched and frightened face, which a little while before had been raised to his as the voice of Veronica had cried to him, "Save him! You will save him? You have so much knowledge, so much power. You will save him for my sake!"

He had promised her nothing; he had only said briefly, in the language of people who were fools, that the issue of life and of death was in the hands of Deity. He had promised her nothing; in his own way he was sincere. Up to that time he had done everything which science and experience could suggest to combat the disease.

Adrianis wrote at intervals various pencilled notes to her; indistinct, feebly scrawled, but still coherent. He pointed to

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each when it was written and looked at his friend with supplicating eyes. He could not speak, for the false membrane filled his throat. Damer took each little note with apparent indifference.

"To the Countess Zaranegra?" he asked.

Adrianis signed a mute assent. Damer carried each scrap of paper to the next room, disinfected it, then sent it to its destination. He was of too proud a temper to use the usual small arts of the traitor.

Once she wrote in reply.

This he did thrice.

"I cannot see, my eyes are too weak," Adrianis scrawled on its envelope as the letter was given to him. "Read it to me."

Damer opened it, and read it aloud. It was short, timid, simple, but a deep love and an intense anxiety spoke in it.

Adrianis took it and laid his cheek on it with a smile of ineffable peace. It seemed to give him firmer hold on life.

Adrianis slept peacefully, his cheek on the little letter, as a child falls to sleep with a favourite toy on its pillow.

He called in a second medical man of the town and two sisters of charity to replace Stefanio, who grew alarmed for his own safety and would no longer approach the bed.

"Send for my mother," said Adrianis, in his choked voice.

"Certainly," answered his friend. The disease which had fastened on Adrianis was not one which waits. But Damer telegraphed only to the Adrianis' palace in Palermo, and he knew that it was unlikely she would be in that city in the summer heats of the end of June.

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The telegram might be forwarded or it might not; Italian households are careless in such matters.

But when he murmured once and again, "Send for my mother!" Damer could, with a clear conscience, reply, "I have telegraphed."

He sat by the bedside and watched the sick man.

He believed that he would recover.

In the dusk he was told that a lady who was below in her gondola desired to see him. He descended the stairs, prepared to find Veronica Zaranegra. She was veiled; he could not see her features, but he knew her by the turn of her head, the shape of her hand, before she spoke.

"You come for news of the Prince?" he said, coldly and harshly. "I can give you none.

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The disease is always uncertain and deceptive."

"Let me see him! oh, let me see him!" she murmured. "I came for that. No matter what they say. No matter what danger there be. Only let me see him!"

"That is wholly impossible," replied Damer, in an unchanged tone. "Why do you come on such errands?"

"Who should see him if not I? Who are you that you should keep me from him?"

"I am a man of science whose duty it is to protect you from yourself. Go home, madame, and pray for your betrothed. That is all that you can do."

She burst into tears. He heard her sobs, he saw the heaving of her shoulders and her breast.

"Take your mistress home.

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She is unwell," he said to the gondolier, who waited a moment for his lady's orders, then, receiving none, pushed his oar against the steps and slowly turned the gondola round to go back up the canal.

"Why does she love him?" thought Damer. "Like to like. Fool to fool. Flower to flower!"

From his soul he despised her, poor lovely, mindless, childlike creature! But her voice turned his blood to flame; the sound of her weeping deepened his scorn to hate; the touch of her ungloved hand was ecstasy and agony in one; he loved her with furious, brutal, unsparing passion, like lava under the ice of his self-restraint.

He stood in the twilight and looked after the black shape of the gondola.

"He shall never be yours," he said in his heart. "Never—never—never! unless I die instead of him to-night."

He remained there some minutes whilst the water traffic passed by him unnoticed, and the crowds flocked out from a novena in the Salute.

The day became evening, the lovely roseate twilight of summer in Venice wore into night, and the night waned into dawn. All the animation of Venetian life began again to awake with the whirr of the wings of the pigeons taking their sunrise flight from dome and cupola and pinnacle and gutter. To the sisters of charity their patient seemed better; to the surgeons of the city also; Damer said nothing.

"Is he not better?" asked the nun, anxiously.

"I see little amelioration,"

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replied Damer, and said in a louder tone to Adrianis, "Your mother has telegraphed; she will soon be here."

Adrianis smiled again a smile which lighted up his beautiful brown eyes and momentarily banished their languor. He felt disposed to sleep, but he drew his pencil and paper to him and wrote feebly, "Mme. Zara-negra?"

Damer read the name.

"She came to see you an hour or two ago," he answered. "But I could not allow it. Your illness is infectious."

He spoke in his usual brief, calm, indifferent manner. Adrianis sighed, but it was a sigh of content; he was half asleep, he turned on his pillows and drew her little note which he had hidden under them once more against his cheek.

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"He will sleep himself well," said the nun.

"Let us hope so," replied Damer; but she heard from his tone that he did not share her belief.

It was now eleven o'clock.

"Go and rest," he said to her. "You need it. I will watch to-night. If there be any necessity for aid I will summon you."

"Will his mother soon be here?" asked the sister, whose heart was tender.

"I believe so," replied Damer.

One of the medical men whom he had summoned came out on to the balcony to his side.

"The sisters say the prince is better; he seems so," said his colleague.

"What do they know?" said Damer; and added less harshly, "It is too early to be able to make sure of recovery; it is a

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disease which is very treacherous."

"He has youth on his side."

"Yes; but he is weakened by the effects of a wound he received last year for which I treated him. His constitution is not prepared to make so soon again another struggle for existence."

"You have more knowledge of him than I," said the Venetian, who was a meek man, not very wise.

"Come to my laboratory in the Fondamente, and I will show you something and tell you something," said Damer.

His Italian colleague, flattered, complied with the request.

What he showed him were three animals, two rabbits and a cat, inoculated with and dying of diphtheria; what he explained to him were the theories of Loeffler

and Klebs and the discovery of the presumed antidote by Behring; he also displayed to him some serum which he had received from Roux, who was only then at the commencement of his applications of Behring's theory.

The Venetian doctor inspected and listened with deep respect.

"Why do you not try this treatment on the prince?" he said, which was what Damer desired and intended him to say.

"I will do so on my own responsibility if he be no better in the morning," he replied. "But you will admit that the responsibility will be great, the theory of the cure being at present unknown to the general public, and no one of his family being at present in Venice to authorise the experiment."

"We are there as your colleagues, and we shall support you," replied the more obscure man, touched and flattered by the deference of one who was in the confidence of French and German men of science.

"If there be no other way, I will take the risk; the risk is less than that of tracheotomy," said Damer, as he put the small phial of serum back into a locked case





## XIV.

**H**EN the Venetian doctor left him he took the phial of serum, the inoculating syringe, and another smaller bottle containing a clear liquid, which was the toxin or virus of the malady, and which he had not shown to the Venetian. He put these together in the breast pocket of his coat. He had no belief in the efficacy of the serum, but he had prepared the venom of the toxin himself; and in that small glass tube there was poison enough to slay twelve men.

"If there be no other way," he repeated to himself as he went back to the hotel through the moonlit canals and under the ancient houses.

The dual meaning which lay in the words was like a devil's laugh in his ears.

He looked up at the Ca' Zaranegra as he passed it; its windows were all dark, and the white lilies on the balconies had no light upon them save that from the rays of the moon.

As he entered the lighted hall of the hotel they handed to him a telegram. It was from the Princess Adrianis. She had received his despatch twelve hours late, as she had been in her summer palace in the mountains; she had left Sicily immediately, and said that she would travel without pause at the utmost speed possible. She

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added : " I commend my darling to God and to you."

Damer crushed the paper up in his hand with a nervous gesture and flung it out, by the open doorway, into the water below.

Then he ascended the staircase, and entered his patient's room.

The night was very warm; the windows stood wide open; there was a shaded porcelain lamp alight on the table. One nun watched whilst the other slept. Adrianis lay still on the great bed in the shadow; he was awake, his eyes were looking upward, his mouth was open but his breathing was easier and less hard.

The sister of charity whispered to Damer, " I think he is better. The fungus growth seems loosening. We have given the wine

and the meat essence. He could swallow."

He lit a candle and approached the bed. Adrianis smiled faintly. He could not speak.

"Let me see your throat," said Damer.

He saw that the nun had spoken truly; the fungus growth was wasting, the false membrane was shrinking; there was a healthier look on the tongue. He set the lamp down and said nothing.

"Is he not better?" said the sister, anxiously.

"Perhaps," he replied. "If there be no re-formation of the false membrane he may be saved. Go, my good woman, and rest while you can."

She went, nothing loth, to her supper and her bed. Damer was alone with the man who trusted him and whose mother trusted him.

He went away from the bedside and sat down by one of the windows. His heart had long years before been rendered dumb and dead; his mind alone remained alive and his passions.

He stayed in the open air, looking down on the green water.

"Man cannot control circumstances," he thought, "but the wise man can assist circumstance, the fool does not."

He had in him that fell egotism of science which chokes the fountain of mercy at its well-springs in blood. He sat by the window and looked out absently at the night.

He knew that the nun was right; he knew that the disease was passing away from the sick man; that, if left alone, sleep and youth would restore him to health, to love, and joy.

Should he leave him alone ?  
Should he let him live to become the lover and lord of Veronica Zaranegra ? Should he let those two mindless, flowerlike lives lean together, and embrace, and multiply ?

It would be what men called a crime, but his school despises the trivial laws of men, knowing that for the wise there is no such thing as crime and no such thing as virtue—only lesions of the brain, and absence of temptation and opportunity.

The mother of Adrianis could not be there before another day, travel as rapidly as she would. He knew the effect of affection on the nervous system, and that the sight and sense of a beloved person near them often gave to enfeebled frames the power of resistance and recovery. Those emotions were not in

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himself, but he recognised their existence, and he knew that in Adrianis the emotions and the affections were very strong in proportion as the mental powers were slight.

He must not await the arrival of the princess. He had before been witness of her devotion, of her skill in illness, of her fortitude, and of the love existing between her and her son. They were powers he despised and never pitied, as he never pitied the love of the nursing bitch from whom he removed her litter that he might watch her die of the agony of her bursting teats. But he was conscious of the existence of such powers; and the physiologist ignores no facts which he has demonstrated, though they may belong to an order with which he has no sympathy.

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He knew that he must not allow the mother of Adrianis to arrive in time to see her son alive.

"What thou doest, do quickly," he murmured in words which he had heard in his childhood as he had sat in the old parish church of his native village.

He rose and walked to the bed.

Adrianis still seemed to sleep, the breathing was heavy and forced chiefly through the nasal passages; but there was a look of returning serenity on his features: a look which the man of science is well aware precedes recovery, not death.

As surely as any one can gauge the unseen future, he was sure that if let alone the young man would recover, would in a week or two arise unharmed from his bed. He

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was equally sure that he had himself, in his breast, the means of changing that process of recovery into the agony of dissolution. He no longer hesitated ; he no longer doubted. He went to the adjacent chamber, where the two nuns, still dressed, were sleeping. He awakened them.

"Come," he said, gently. "He is worse. I am about to try the cure of Behring. It may succeed. There is no other chance. It will be necessary to hold him. I require you both."

He was well aware that it would be unwise to essay that operation alone—it would rouse comment in the day to come.

"Hold him motionless," he said to the two women. "Do not awake him if you can avoid it."

He filled the inoculating syringe from one of the little





Damer bent over him and inserted the injecting-needle into one of the veins ; the incident disturbed him without wholly loosening the bonds of the soporific ; he struggled slightly, moaned a little, but the nuns succeeded in resisting his endeavour to rise.

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phials which he had brought from the Fondamente. He stood in the full light of the lamp so that the two sisters could see all that he did.

"Loosen his shirt," he said to them. Adrianis still slept; in his predisposition to sleep the few drops of chloral which had been administered twenty minutes earlier, had sufficed to render him almost insensible.

Damer bent over him and inserted the injecting needle into one of the veins; the incision disturbed him without wholly loosening the bonds of the soporific; he struggled slightly, moaned a little, but the nuns succeeded in resisting his endeavour to rise; the inoculation was successfully made.

The face of Damer in the lamplight was not paler than

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usual, but his hand trembled as he withdrew the syringe.

"What is Behring's cure?" asked the nun who felt most interest in her patient.

"An antitoxin; the serum of an immune beast," he answered, calmly, as he turned slightly towards her. The nun did not understand, but she was afraid of troubling him with other questions.

He walked to the window and stood looking out at the moonlit water.

He had left on a table the syringe and the phial of serum which was half empty. But in the breast pocket of his coat he had the phial of toxin, and that phial was wholly empty. The nuns, engrossed in holding down Adrianis, had not seen that the glass tube on the table was not the one from which the syringe

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had been filled ; and, when used, Damer had plunged the syringe immediately into a bowl of disinfecting acid. There was no trace anywhere that the toxin had been used instead of the serum ; no trace whatever save in the tumifying vein of the sick man's throat.

"You had better stay near him, you may be wanted, and it is two o'clock," said Damer to the nurses. "I shall remain here. There will be, I hope, a great change soon."

He went out on to the balcony and turned his back on the watching women and leaned against the iron-work, looking down on the canal, where nothing moved except the slow, scarcely visible ripple of the water. He was human though he had killed his humanity, replacing it by intellect alone. He

suffered in that moment; a vague sense of what ignorance calls crime was on him painfully ; he had emancipated himself wholly from the superstitions and prejudices of men, but he was conscious that he had now done that which, if known, would put him outside the pale of their laws.

He did not repent or regret ; he did not see any evil in his act. The right of the strong, the right of the sage was his ; he had but exercised his reason to produce an issue he desired.

So he thought as he leaned against the iron scroll work and watched the thick, dark water glide by past the marble steps of the Salute. There was a faint light in the sky on the east, but he could not see the east where he stood ; it was still completely night between the

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walls of the Grand Canal. The voice of a man called up to him from the darkness below.

"Madam sends me to know how goes it with the prince?"

Damer looked down. "Tell the Countess Zaranegra that things are as they were. A new remedy has been essayed."

The man who had come by the calle retired by them, swinging a lantern in his hand.

The two Vulcans of the clock-tower, hard by in St. Mark's square, struck four times upon their anvil. Damer looked up the darkness of the canal where nothing was to be seen but the lamps which burned on either side of it with their reflections, and the lanthorns tied to poles before some of the palaces. He could not see the Ca' Zaranegra, which was not in sight even in the day, but he saw it in remem-

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brance with its flowering balconies, its tapestried chambers, its red and white awnings, its great escutcheon over its portals. He saw her in his vision as she must be now—awake, listening for her messenger's return, in some white, loose gown no doubt, with her hair loose, too, upon her shoulders, her face white, her eyes strained in anxiety, as he had seen them that afternoon and evening.

If Adrianis had lived she would have been his wife: that was as certain as that the sea was beating on the bar of Malomocco underneath the moon.

“I have done well; I have exercised my supremacy,” he thought. “We have right of life and death over all birds, and beasts, and things which swim and crawl, by virtue of our greater brain; in like manner has the greater

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brain the right to deal as it will with the weaker brain when their paths meet and one must yield and go under. The fool hath said that there is sanctity in life, but the man of science has never said it. To him one organism or another has the same measure in his scales."

Strangely enough, at that moment and incongruously there came to him a remembrance of his own childish days : of sitting by his mother's side in the little, dark, damp church of their northern hamlet, and reading written on their tablets the Twelve Commandments.

"Mother, what is it to do murder?" he had asked her; and she had answered, "It is to take life ; to destroy what we cannot recall."

He remembered how, some weeks later, when he had killed

from wantonness a mole which ran across a road, he had been frightened and had gone to his mother and said to her, "Mother, mother, I have done murder. I have taken life and I cannot recall it." And his mother had smiled and answered, "That is not murder, my dear. A little mole is a dumb creature."

But his mother had been wrong, as the world was wrong. Whether the organism were animal or human, what difference was there? Only a difference of brain.

The world and its lawgivers might and would still say that what destroyed the human organism was murder, that is, a crime; but to the trained, logical, strong reason of Damer the sophism was a premiss untenable. To slay a man was no more than to slay a mole. To

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do either was to arrest a mechanism, to dissolve tissues, to send elements back into the space they came from; it was nothing more. One organism or another, what matter?

Since that day in the dim long ago, he had taken life, not once, not twice, but thousands of times, causing the greatest and most lingering agony in its inflictions. But in his opinion that had not been murder; it had been only torture and slaughter of dumb creatures according to human law. What difference could there be if, by accident, the creature to be removed were human?

He was consistent enough, and sincere enough to follow out the theories of the laboratory to their logical sequence without flinching. He honestly held himself without blame.

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He was only a man, and therefore he felt some sickly sense of pain when he heard in the still and waning night the sound of his victim's convulsive struggles to gain breath ; but he held himself without blame, for every thesis and every deduction of the priesthood of science justified and made permissible his action to bring about a catastrophe which was necessary to him.

Science bade him take all the other sentient races of earth and make them suffer as he chose and kill them as he chose. Those other races were organisms as susceptible as the human organisms. Why should the human organism enjoy immunity ?

He had done no more than is done for sake of experiment or observation in the hospital or the laboratory every day all over the

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known world. The reluctance to face what he had done was merely that residue of early influences and impressions which remains in the soul of the strongest, haunting its remembrances and emasculating its resolution.

He called up to his command that volition, that power of will which had never failed him ; he returned to the bedside as he would have returned to visit a dog dying under the pressure of eight atmospheres.

Adrianis still lay in the same position. About the almost invisible orifice where the needle had punctured there was a slight tumified swelling.

"He seems worse," whispered the nun.

"He cannot be either better or worse as yet," replied Damer, truthfully. "Give him a little wine, if he can take it."

They might give him what they chose; they could not now save him from death. He had received enough of the virus into his vein to slay a man in health. Passing as it did into an organ already diseased, he would die before the sun rose, or an hour after.

He had aided nature to destroy her own work. There was nothing new or criminal in that—nature was for ever creating and destroying. Once it had suited him to save that young man's life; now it suited him to end it.

One action was as wrong or as righteous as the other. It was an exercise of power, as when the monarch grants an amnesty or signs a death warrant. Who blames the monarch who does but use his power? The prerogative of superior

reason is higher than the prerogative of a monarch. Moreover, who would ever know it? Who would ever be aware that the intenser virus of the toxin had mingled with the natural formation of the disease?

Even were there an autopsy, discovery would be impossible; the concentrated venom had mingled with and been absorbed in the common and usual growth of the false membrane. He had but aided death instead of hindering it.

His professional conscience would have shrunk from giving the disease, but it did not shrink from making death certain where it was merely possible. He did but add a stronger poison to that which nature had already poisoned.

Men slew their rivals in duels and no one blamed them; who

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should blame him because he used the finer weapon of science instead of the coarser weapon of steel? He did but carry out the doctrine of the laboratory to its just and logical sequence.

What he felt for Veronica was not love, but passion, and not passion alone, but the sense of dominion. He knew that the fair creature shrank from him but submitted to him. All the intense instinctive tyranny of his nature longed to exercise itself on her, the beautiful and patrician thing, so far above him, so fragile and so fair. He knew that he would never possess her or command her except through fear; but this would suffice to him. The finer and more delicate elements of love were indifferent to him, were indeed unknown. They had existed in

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Adrianis, whom he had despised; but in his own temperament they could find no dwelling-place. His desires were brutal as had ever been those of Attila, whose throne lies low amongst the grass on Torcello.

Late at night and early at dawn messengers came from some noble families in the city, and the Ca' Zaranegra. Damer replied to all inquiries, "It is impossible to say what turn the disease may take."

Damer said nothing. He looked out at the marble church which had no message for him, and down the moonlit waters which had no beauty for him. He was absorbed in meditation. His will desired to do that from which his natural weakness shrank; for in his great strength he was still weak being human. The infliction of death was

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nothing to him; could be nothing; he was used to kill as he was used to torture with profound indifference, with no more hesitation, than he ate or drank or fulfilled any natural function of his body. To obtain knowledge, even the approach of knowledge, he would have inflicted the most agonising and the most endless suffering without a moment's doubt or a moment's regret. From his boyhood upwards he had always lived in the hells created by modern science, wherein if the bodies of animals suffer the souls of men wither and perish. What was the man lying sleeping there to him? Only an organism like those which daily he broke up and destroyed and threw aside. Only an organism, filled by millions of other invisible organisms by a myriad of parasite

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animalculæ, numerous as the star-dust in the skies.

The woman whom he desired was nothing more ; he could not deem her more ; he scorned himself for the empire over him of his own desire of her perishable form, of her foolish butterfly life. He himself was no more, but there was alight in him that light of the intellect which in his own esteem raised him above them into an empyrean unknown by them. His intellect made him as Cæsar, as Pharaoh ; their foolishness made them as slaves.

The time is nigh at hand when there will be no priests and no kings but those of science, and beneath their feet the nations will grovel in terror and writhe in death.

He went out again into the balcony, leaving the nuns to endeavour to administer the

wine, which, however, their patient could not swallow, the fungus growth closed his larynx. His head was thrown back on the pillows ; his eyes were staring but sightless ; his face was pallid and looked blue round the mouth and about the temples. He was now straining for breath ; like a horse fallen on the road, blown and broken.

They called loudly to Damer, being frightened and horrified. He re-entered the chamber.

“He is worse,” he said, gravely.

The nun, who had a tender heart, wept. Damer sat down by the bed. He had seen that struggle for air a thousand times in all the hospitals of Europe. It could now have but one end.

A little while after they brought him a note and a telegram. The first was from the

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Countess Zaranegra. It said : “ You must let me see him. It is my right, my place.”

The second was from the mother of Adrianis; it said : “ I have reached Bologna ; I shall soon be with you. God bless you for your goodness to my son.”

He read them, and tore the one in pieces and flung the pieces in the canal ; the other he put in his breast pocket beside the empty phial of toxin.

The mother’s letter would be useful if any called in question the too late usage of the Behring serum. It would show the complete confidence placed in him by the writer. At that moment his two Venetian colleagues arrived. The day had dawned. The women put out the light of the lamps.

“ You have given the anti-

toxin?" said the elder of the Venetians, glancing at the syringe.

"I have," replied Damer. "But, I believe, too late."

"I fear too late," replied the Venetian. "Not less admirable is your courage in accepting such responsibility."

Damer bowed. He looked grave and worn, which was natural in a man who had been in anxious vigil through thirty-six hours by the bedside of his friend.

"Have you any hope?" whispered the Venetian.

"I confess none, now," he answered.

The pure light of earliest daybreak was in the whole of the vast chamber.

It shone on that ghastly sight, a man dying in his youth, struggling and straining for a breath

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of air, fighting against suffocation.

The fresh sea air was flowing through the room, sweet with the odours of fruits and flowers, free to the poorest wretch that lived. But in all that bounteous liberty and radiance of air he could not draw one breath, he could not reach one wave of it, to slake his thirst of life.

The poisoned growth filled every chink of the air passages as though they were tubes mortared up and closed hermetically. His face grew purple and tumid, his eyes started from their sockets, his arms waved wildly, beckoning in space; he had no sense left except the mere instinctive mechanical effort to gasp for the air which he was never to breathe again. The five persons round him stood in silence, while the stifled sobs

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of the nun were heard; the splash of oars echoed from the water below; somewhere without a bird sang.

The Venetians spoke one with another, then turned to Damer.

"The end must be near. We ought to call in the assistance of the Church. We must not let him perish thus, unshrived, unannealed, like a pagan, like a dumb creature."

"Do whatever you deem right," replied Damer. "With those matters I do not meddle."

The minutes went on; the nuns sank on their knees; the one who wept hid her face on the coverlet of the bed. All which had so lately been the youth, the form, the vitality of Adrianis wrestled with death as a young lion tears at the walls of the den which imprisons him. The terrible

choking sounds roared through the air to which his closed throat could not open. Blood foamed in froth from his lips, which were curled up over the white teeth, and were cracked and blue. His eyes, starting from their orbits, had no sight. Damer ceased to look; almost he regretted that which he had done.

Suddenly the convulsions ceased.

"He is out of pain," said one of the Venetians, in a solemn and hushed voice.

"He is dead," said Damer.

The women crossed themselves.

The little bird outside sang loudly.

The door opened, and the mother of Adrianis stood on the threshold.

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Six months later the man who had killed him wedded Veronica Zaranegra. Her family opposed, and her friends warned her, in vain; she shrank from him, she feared him, she abhorred him, but the magnetism of his will governed hers till he shaped her conduct at his choice, as the hand of the sculptor moulds the clay.

He became master of her person, of her fortune, of her destiny; but her soul, frightened and dumb, forever escapes from him, and hides in the caverns of memory and regret.



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COMEDY."

*THIRD EDITION*

LONDON  
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To A.

DESIDERIUM ANIMÆ EJUS TRIBUISTI EI  
DOMINE, ET VOLUNTATE LABIORUM  
EJUS NON FRAUDASTI EUM.

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VITAM PETIIT A TE, ET TRIBUISTI EI  
LONGITUDINEM DIERUM IN  
SÆCULUM SÆCULI.

*February 7th, 1892.*

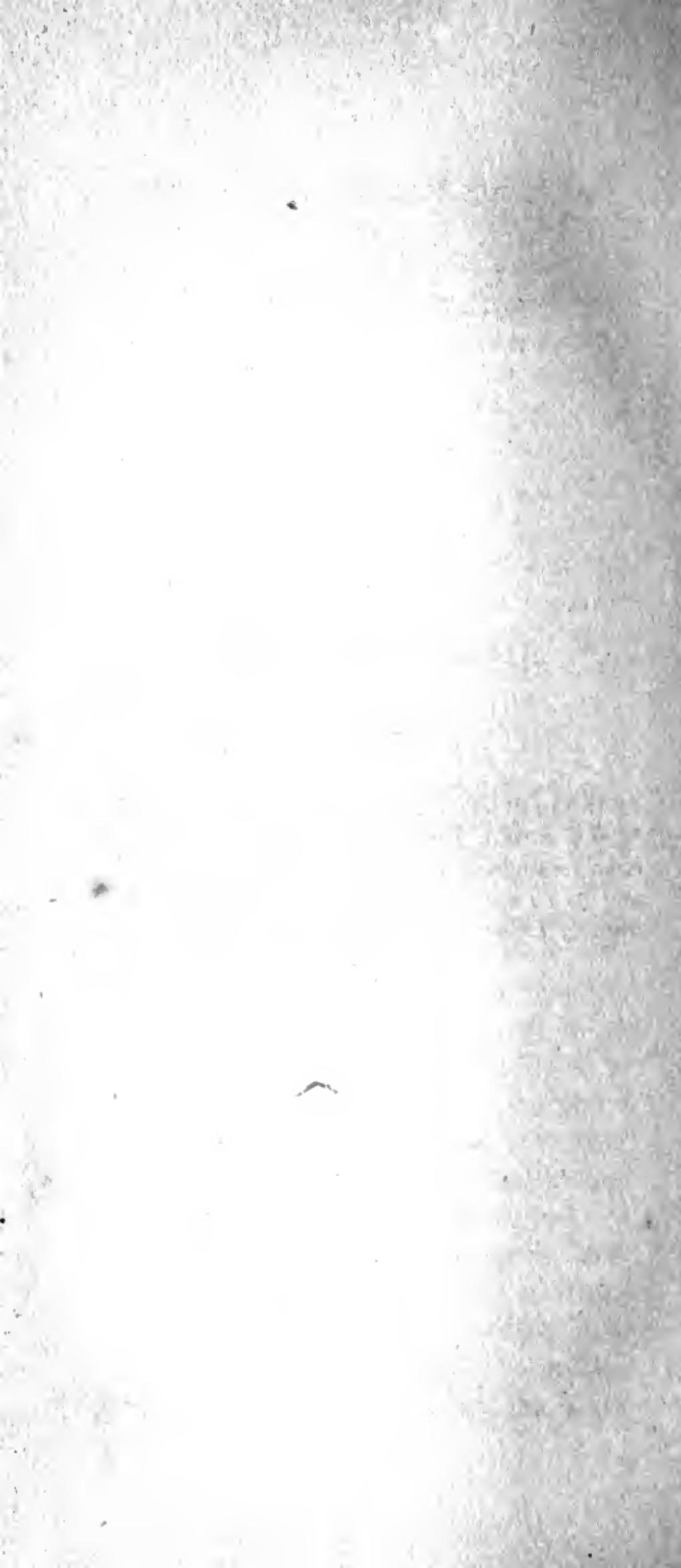
"IN order to judge whether what is said or done by any character be well or ill, we are not to consider that speech or action alone, whether in itself it be good or bad, but also by whom it is spoken or done, to whom, at what time, in what manner, or for what end. . . .

"To opinion, or what is commonly said to be, may be referred even such things as are improbable and absurd ; and it may also be said that events of that kind are, sometimes, not really improbable ; since, 'it is probable that many things should happen contrary to probability.'"—ARISTOT., *Poet.*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE.



IN the brief sketches of Farmer Battle and Miss Caroline Battle, the author's aim has been to suggest, not to reproduce, a dialect; and by so doing he ventures to think he is humbly following many great examples.





## PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

**H**IIS little work has been received with such extraordinary kindness, and the author has been scolded for its faults with such generosity and grace, that he could almost wish he might offend his critics again, if only for the honour of being so wittily rebuked. There is a story told of a man who begged his wife to tell him his besetting sin, "In order," said he, "that I may conquer it, and so please you in all respects." With much reluctance, and only after many exhortations to be honest, the lady replied that she feared he was selfish. "I am not perfect," said her husband, "and perhaps I am a sinful

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creature, but if there is one fault which I thank God I do not possess it is selfishness. Anything but that!" and as he spoke, he passed her the apples—they were at luncheon—and set himself to work on the only peach. Now the author is in the same frame of mind with regard to the charge of flippancy: he cannot bring himself to own that he is flippant: he longs to be told his short-comings, he is most eager to please his readers in all respects, but he will not admit that he is cynical—anything but that. He is by nature so extremely serious that, like the good angel who liked laughter, he has thought it wiser to curb his disposition at all events for the present. A greater part of the book was composed under the strain of bad health, and all of it in circumstances of peculiar anxiety. If the author had written as he felt and thought, the result would have been very far from amusing. And his sole aim has been to amuse. In times of illness, irritability, and grief, he has often cast about him for some light reading—simple yet not altogether meaningless, unreal yet not impossible: he has longed to draw a veil on actualities

and see a shadow-life frisking on tiptoes, followed by a dance of sorrows and a merry-making of cares. He does not presume to say that he has fulfilled his own desire in the following pages, but the desire in question may explain their tone.

In conclusion, this fantasia makes no claim to the great title of novel, and is, indeed, no more than it is called—“A Study in Temptations”—and it will be found that at least one form of temptation, if not more, is dealt with in each chapter.







## A STUDY IN TEMPTA- TIONS.

### PROLOGUE.

WHICH CONTAINS ALL THE TRAGEDY  
OF THE BOOK.

**M**ARY Cecilia, aged seventeen, with whom lies buried all the hope, all the belief in God and goodness of her husband, Charles Sydney Jenyns."

The grave-digger who spelled out this inscription on the coffin, nudged his companion, and they clambered up the sides of the grave to stare after a man, who, with dragging steps and bent head, was slowly groping

his way out of the cemetery. He avoided the path, and slunk round and among the numerous mounds and monuments, frequently stumbling, and often halting outright.

"Did you see 'is face?" said the elder of the grave-diggers; "'e ain't a day more'n two-and-twenty. 'Tain't every one as marries so fool-'ardy young as gits out of it so easy!"

His assistant, less philosophical but more kindly, blinked his eyes and gave a cheerless laugh. "'E pro'bly thinks," he said, "as 'e's the 'ardest done-by in the 'ole world. 'E don't see as it all stands to reason, as you and me do, bless yer. 'E only thinks as when 'e gits 'ome there won't be nobody there!"

"I knows some," said his senior, with a grim smile, "as 'ud thank the Almighty if they could go 'ome and find the 'ouse empty! *They* wouldn't say nothink agin the goodness of Gord, *they* wouldn't. *They* wouldn't be writin' none of this 'ere. *They* would be foldin' their 'ands and sayin' as Gord's will

is for the best, and be-yaving themselves like Christians!"

Then they resumed their work, and in working forgot to moralise.

The object of their remarks, meanwhile, having refused to drive home in the solitary mourning coach which with the hearse had formed the funeral procession, found his strength so unequal to the task of walking, that he sank on a bench outside a public-house, which stood conveniently near the entrance to the cemetery. He was, as the gravedigger had observed, quite young and certainly not more than two-and-twenty. He was tall, but somewhat bent—not that he stooped, there was rather a leaning forward of his whole body. His brilliant eyes seemed to have burnt deep into their sockets, and they cast a flickering light on the pallor of his cheeks, which looked the more pale in contrast with his dark hair.

He was at an early stage of grief, and he felt as though he were two beings—one, speechless and stricken; the other, a mere spectator, who philosophised, and mocked, and wept, and laughed by starts and was

only constant in watching. That he was sorrowful, he guessed—but what was sorrow? He knew that he had loved—yet what was love? He lived—and what was life? Mary was dead. Immortality might be, but she once was. O lovely fact to weigh against the ghost-like possibility!

To whatever end his thoughts were tending, (and the way was broad), they were diverted, for the moment at least, by the potman, who, moved by compassion, or following his invariable custom in dealing with mourners, came out to tell him, that there was a private room within, where he would find a fire, writing materials, and the daily papers. Jenyns, to his own amazement, but as the potman had foreseen, acted on the hint and followed him into a small, musty room which barely atoned for its stale odour, its dismal light, and oppressive warmth, by being empty. The potman poked the fire, smoothed out the *Sportsman*, stirred the ink with the one quill in the pen-tray, and, while thus exercising his hands, had his eyes and his wits con-

centrated on the mysterious and melancholy wayfarer.

The interest Jenyns had created in the minds of the grave-diggers, was slight compared with the sensation he had as unconsciously produced among the patrons of the "Jolly Nell." (The original sign had been the "Jolly Knell," but this having been repudiated by the present proprietor—an Irishman—as Dutch spelling, the *K* was painted out.) Jenyns's bearing, appearance, and expression were so unusual, and his features so handsome, that had the same gossips met him under the most commonplace conditions, they would still have paused to guess his calling, or to wonder what path lay before him. On this occasion, however, the despair on his countenance, the possible romance connected with it, and the unlikeness between himself and the mean—almost abject—circumstances of the funeral, gave him a prominence far greater, than if he had buried his dead with every elegant sign of still more elegant grief.

As the landlady pointed out, had he been really poor, he would have

driven home in the carriage—a poor man could not afford to miss such chances ; further, he would not have been alone, for his family, or at least his neighbours, would have seized the opportunity for a breath of fresh air and a nice change : they would have made it, in fact, a chastened holiday-jaunt. She did not use that particular phrase, but her nod was to that effect. Her crowning observation that he was a student, or something of that, who had got some young woman into trouble, and the poor thing had died of a broken heart, and he was being eat up by remorse, was made in a whisper so thrilling, that it pierced through the thin door and reached Jenyns's sensitive ear. He waited to hear no more, but leaving half-a-crown (his last) on the table, walked so quickly and noiselessly out of the house, that the group in the bar-room, who were so eagerly discussing him, did not notice his departure.

Once on the main road, he seemed to gain a certain composure, and his strength of limb ; he walked hurriedly and was, in fact, racing against the thoughts which threat-

ened every moment to outstrip and overcome him. When he finally halted it was nearly evening, and he had reached a dingy dwelling in one of the streets near King's Cross. The neighbourhood was poor and the door of the house stood open—as doors may, when there is little to offer friends and nothing to tempt the thieving.

A small boy and his mother stood by the area railings, and they both looked after Jenyns as he passed in.

"Mother," said the boy, tugging at the woman's apron—"mother, next time a lodger dies may I have another half-holiday?"

Jenyns heard the question, and, smiling faintly, walked slowly up the creaking staircase till he reached a room on the fourth landing. He crept in and gazed stupidly around it: noticed that there was a cupboard door half-open, a few medicine bottles on the mantelpiece, a pile of women's garments on a chair, a white straw hat, trimmed with ribbons, on the chest of drawers. Inch by inch his eyes travelled from the chair to the table, from

the table to the floor, from the floor to a pair of small, muddy shoes with ridiculous French heels, from the shoes to the bed, and there, as it seemed to him, he saw her lying as she had been for two days past, before they lifted her into the coffin.

"God ! O God !" he called.

But no God answered.

He bent over the imaginary form. "Wake up !" he whispered—"wake up ! You are dreaming, that's all. You have often dreamt before. Wake up ! Mary ! Mary ! are you so tired ? "

Outside the house he heard a rustling, a strange shrieking and wailing. Was it *all* the wind ? It seemed to the half-crazed man a Presence—a host of Presences swarming in at the windows, down the chimney, and gathering round him.

"I do not fear you," he said ; "there is no worse torment than living. Where you are, Hell must be, and you are everywhere. Pain is nothing ; everything is nothing ; You are nothing. But—damn you—I will believe in you if you can wake"—he pointed to the empty

bed—"if you can wake *one of us.*"

"I cannot," said a sorrowful voice. Jenyns rubbed his eyes, and burst out laughing.

"Oh, is it only you, Wrath?" he said. "What a fool I am; I thought you were the devil."

The man he addressed, and who had followed him into the room unperceived, was of middle height and extraordinarily thin: his features and form looked misty and ill-defined, as though he stood behind a cloud and were trying to pierce through it.

"Would you have your wife live again that she may die again?" he said, quietly—"that you may bury her again?"

"No, no," muttered Jenyns—"no, no, not *this* again. A jump from the window or a prick at my throat would settle my mind for ever. If there *is* a hereafter I would know it, and if there isn't—well, I could not feel the disappointment. Clay has no illusions to lose. You see," he added, "I have not called up the devil for nothing!"

Jenyns's idea of religion—picked

from street-corners and Ingersoll—began and ended with the doctrine of Eternal Punishment. When he was happy and thought himself an enlightened believer in the possibility of a Supreme Reason, he forgot it ; when he was in trouble, he could think of nothing else. Sometimes it filled him with panic, sometimes with desperation : more often than all with a longing to be in the Place of Torment—to know the worst, to put an end to the torturing suspense and doubt.

"If the devil can answer your curses," said Wrath, "why not try whether God will answer prayers ?"

"Cursing is quick," said Jenyns, "and prayers are long. Call Satan but under your breath and he comes. But God—you may wear out your knees and your voice before He will answer, and then He will give you not peace but a sword, not ease but a thorn in the flesh, not love but chastisements ! The greater the saint, the thicker the scourge ! Where's the fool who would pray day and night for such blessings ? Have I not grief enough and despair

enough but I must entreat for more?"

Wrath groaned. "Human nature is so discontented!" he said: "I have been starving for a month, and I must own that this constant gnawing at one's vitals becomes tedious: I would prefer a newer pain."

"Let us both pray for another sort of anguish," said Jenyns, "the good old monks were artistic: they believed that variety was beauty, so they occasionally skinned a heretic before they boiled him!"

Wrath accepted this as a sign of returning cheerfulness. "The story runs so well," he said, "I will not be pedantic and press for your authority. But it sounds like an evangelical tract." He rose from his seat and began to pace the floor. Life to him was a pilgrimage, and the fortunes and misfortunes of the journey troubled him but little; he could not understand despair. "Perhaps you are best alone," he said; "my mother used to say that to be alone with grief was to live in company with angels. I think she knew; she had a great deal to endure. If I sell my picture we can

run over to Venice together ; I mean, of course, if you would care to go with me. . . . I do not wonder this room is gloomy ; it has stolen the odour of a dozen honest dinners. Let us go down in the kitchen and see the baby. I sketched her this morning ; here it is : ‘ Study of an Infant Genius : aged four days.’ ”

“ Don’t talk of her,” said Jenyns, fiercely ; “ I never wish to look upon her face again. She killed her mother. . . . I see no God in nature—only Hell, cruel, relentless, hideous.”

“ Bah ! ” said Wrath. “ Don’t get your nose in an artificial manure heap and think you are studying nature. If you take Zola for your gospel and the gospel for fiction, God must help you. I cannot. Where is your spirit ? ”

“ I do not want to be a hero,” said Jenyns, sullenly, “ or a saint ; I want my wife.”

“ Heroes and husbands are made by the occasion,” said Wrath ; “ no one is born a husband and no one is born a pious, homicidal hero ! At first he is just man—man with a

birthright of seven deadly sins and one small conscience. There never was a saint, you may rest perfectly sure, but he might have fallen twenty times a day, if he had not fought the enemy with fine courage. Why don't you howl because the trees are bare? Who would think that such grim skeletons could ever be bright with leaves again, or look just as they did last year? Yet they will; and so, when the time comes, you will see your wife; you have only buried the dead leaves of a soul." At no time an eloquent man but always one to whom speech was even a painful effort, he went out of the room after this outburst. With the inconsequence of the artistic reason he had a sudden idea for a picture he was then designing.

Jenyns was once more alone. He gave a feeble laugh and hurried to the window; it was open; he looked down and shivered. Then he looked up at the dark sky.

"God," he said, "if you are there, and if you know everything, you must be sorry for me."

He climbed up on the sill, held

out his arms, and with a sob leapt into the night and eternity.

A second later Wrath re-entered. He was breathless, and was reading a letter.

"Now admit," he said, "there *is* a God who answers prayers. We can go to Venice. Tooth has sold my '*Antigone*.' Three hundred \_\_\_\_\_"

His only answer was a shout of horror, a hum of voices, a sound of hurrying in the street below. He leaned out of the window and understood the confusion.

"*Mater Dei!*" he cried. "Ah, don't groan! Lift him gently! Take care! Five pounds—twenty—to the man who is quickest with the doctor!"

A man looked up from the crowd. "I should like to see the five pound *fust*," he said. A faint titter greeted his wisdom; an old woman sobbed.

"Come away!" said a girl, who was hanging on the arm of her sweetheart; "there is always something to spoil my evening out!"

The titter and the sob, the sweet-

heart's retreating footsteps, and Jenyns's death moan, each gave their note to the great unceasing murmur of the city.





## CHAPTER I.

UP-AT-BATTLE'S.

**H**E family of Drawne was not distinguished till the time of the Reformation, when one Richard Drawne was rewarded for his holy zeal in the suppression of monasteries, by a large grant of confiscated church property, including the Abbey of St. Wilfred, with the manor-house, monastery and demesne lands of the same, amounting to four thousand three hundred acres. He did not live long to enjoy his honours, but died of a fever, leaving his daughter, Anne, sole heiress. In the reign of Edward VI. this lady married the Earl of Warbeck, and thus brought her great wealth to that ancient house which had become sadly

impoverished for various but uninteresting causes. The heiress, however, was very tenacious of her female right, and left no legal loopholes by which her property could become one with the Warbeck peerage: the Drawne acres were an inheritance past comparison with any empty earldom. But during three centuries of struggle and change which followed, male heirs in direct succession never failed, and the Earls of Warbeck, by innocently anticipating the miraculous policy of the Vicar of Bray, not only held their possessions, but escaped the inconvenient glories of persecution and martyrdom.

At the time of our story, Henry Fitzgerald George Vandeleur Shannon was 15th Earl of Warbeck, and one Jane Shannon stood in the inconsiderable relation of niece to his lordship. Jane's father had been the fourth son of the late Earl —a kinship in itself sufficiently contemptible from the standpoint of the heir, but when the said fourth son married the daughter of a yeoman-farmer, he lost even the small right he had to twinkle in the

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Warbeck heaven, and was considered—not a fallen star, but no star at all.

Since the object of such just indignation and scorn was unable to earn his own bread (from the fact, no doubt, that he had half-killed himself writing a Prize Essay—“*De Labore*”), he lived on the charity of his yeoman father-in-law till, as he himself expressed it, he left a world where he was not wanted, to abide with that sleek host, the worm. In other words, he died of his own grim humour, assisted by a certain difficulty in breathing, a trouble in his liver, a pain in his head, and a grip at his left side. His wife, who was with child at the time of his death, postponed breaking her heart till she had brought forth her little one, and then she turned her sad face to the wall, and died also. The care of the child thus fell to the yeoman-farmer, who, by this time, may be said to have some claim on the reader’s sympathy.

Samuel Battle—such was his name—came of sound stock. One John Battle and Matthew his brother had fought under Cromwell. Their

descendants, under the Restoration, had, with two exceptions, abandoned the field of war for the more tranquil, if less conspicuous, honours of farming. Of the exceptions, one was a certain Anthony, a scholar and wit, who wrote some love verses and a comedy (compositions, which, dying to posterity, had left their reputation like some unhallored spirit to haunt the family conscience) ; the other, Nicholas, was one of the some two thousand clergy who were expelled from their parishes for Nonconformity in 1662. It was from this Nicholas that Samuel Battle, the yeoman-farmer, took his descent. Jane Shannon was heiress, therefore, to many conflicting dispositions.

Battle's farm, or, as it was known in the district, "Up-at-Battle's," lay some eight miles to the east of Brentmore, a small watering-place in the south of England, noted for its scenery, its climate, and the sleep-bringing mission of its air. The farm-house was unpretentious, and though presenting to a town-trained eye an appearance of picturesque antiquity, it was, in fact,

an extremely ugly cottage of the Victorian era, made to look rambling and picturesque by means of the numerous rooms, store-cupboards, and outhouses added to it during Battle's own lifetime. The property, when he first came into possession, had consisted of pasture-land, a small orchard, and a large yard. The greater part of the original homestead (built about 1700) had been destroyed by fire, and Battle's father, acting on the advice of a young and second wife, had completed the work of destruction, by building on its ruins the aforesaid Victorian cottage. An unkind rumour had it, that what remained of the best parlour of the first Mrs. Battle, could now be recognised in the most retired portion of the dwelling.

Samuel Battle, on coming into his inheritance, was not slow to show himself a man of singular energy, perseverance, and shrewdness : he was quick to see that letting land was more profitable than tilling it. He was also in favour of small plots and short leases—the advantages of which,

as he was careful to point out to dubious tenants, cut both ways, although they might occasionally cut a bit deeper on one side than on the other. An enigmatic saying, which time and the increasing value of the ground made clear.

His education, culled as it was from the Scriptures, and guiltless of School Board trimmings, gave him a command of language, a stern dignity and sterner refinement, than could be found now in younger men of his station, who too often talk big words from their favourite newspaper, mistake insolence for independence, and swagger for good breeding. Dr. Johnson's saying that "the Devil was the first Whig" was the first article of Battle's political belief, and, a staunch Nonconformist, he so far availed himself of the right of private judgment that where his co-religionists read "*Down with authority,*" he only discovered exhortations to obedience. He was, therefore, a Tory, but for no other reason than because he did not see how a professed Christian could be anything else. From

which it would seem that if Samuel Battle did wrong he did it rightly.

At the time of which we write, the inmates of the farm-house numbered four, and were Battle himself, his spinster daughter Miss Caroline, his one grandchild Jane Shannon, and a young boy named De Boys Mauden, who was his nephew by marriage—a relative as distant as he was poor.

Jane was three years younger than De Boys, and when he first came to the farm-house, he was seven, and she, four. He was handsome, but she was a plain little creature, all eyes and legs, though the eyes had fire, and the legs were shapely.

The child as she grew up was taught to read and write, to add figures, to make butter and jam, to do plain sewing, and to work hideous patterns with Berlin wool on blue canvas. When she was nine, she was sent to a day-school, and had lessons in drawing, French, and music, and her education, on the whole, was no less thorough than that of many young ladies of fashion. She could write, "The

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gardener's wife has two children" in a foreign language, and she, too, in the course of time strummed Heller's "Tarentella," the "Moonlight" sonata, and Chopin's Valses. She played them to De Boys long before he had learnt the manners to listen.

She was brought up as a Dissenter, but her father had been a devout Catholic, and it had been promised that when she arrived at years of discretion, she would be given every opportunity to hear the claims of Catholicism. In the meantime, however, no pains were spared to warn her against Anti-christ, the Mother of harlots, and idolatry; for the wives and daughters of the deacons thought it a terrible sign of more iniquitous practices to come, when it was known that she cherished her dead father's rosary and crucifix.

Jane's instructor in the useful arts, such as mending, darning, patch-work, and the like, was her aunt, Miss Caroline. Miss Caroline Battle was what men call a sensible woman, which is a way of saying that she did not attach too much weight to

their smiles, although she could always smile in her turn. She was comely, too, with soft brown eyes and a pillow-like figure, which counteracted the occasional sharpness of her tongue. Miss Caroline, like happy Peter Bell, beheld but did not speculate : she tended her garden, watched the stars, and read two chapters of Scripture every night of her life. She kept hens, and ducks, and bees, and her butter was the pride of the county. She possessed a Maltese lace shawl, and an illustrated Shakespeare, also a set of Whitby jet ornaments, and an amethyst brooch. These treasures, however, she kept locked in her wardrobe because they were heirlooms, and as such were treasured in silver paper. For light literature she gave Jane "The Pilgrim's Progress," "Lady Audley's Secret," "Amy Herbert," "Paul and Virginia," "Roderick Random," "Æsop's Fables," "Robinson Crusoe," and, on Sunday afternoons and anniversaries, Dante's "Inferno," illustrated by Doré. The horrors of this last, while they struck misery to Jane's soul,

were largely mitigated by the story of Francesca de Rimini, which, Miss Caroline thought, could only be edifying, since, from all she could gather, the whole Rimini family were in Hell, and burning examples of foreign immorality and its just reward. Why so gentle a being as Caroline Battle should take satisfaction, so deep-reaching that it amounted to pleasure, in a tale which for exciting pity and terror is hardly to be matched, can only be accounted for on the ground, that Hell and sin, as actualities, were so impossible to her imagination, that she believed in one and disapproved of the other as a child swallows medicine, and "hates" porridge.

To Jane, however, whose character was of a very different cast—for she saw everything through the rainbow haze of her own moods—the idea of being damned for love became so familiar and so fascinating, that to love *without* losing one's soul (if, indeed, such a thing were possible), seemed to her dull, spiritless, monotonous, and bumpkin like. To marry, to

settle, to grow stout, and at the last to be "*Jane, wife of the above, aged 74. Until the day break and the shadows flee away.*" Unthinkable prospect ! But to float in the air through countless ages—a sight to inspire poets and make them swoon—that were a destiny worthy the name ! She confided this opinion to De Boys, who agreed that it would be fine to swim in the winds ; but he thought that a girl hanging on his neck would mar the gloriousness of the excursion. Such is the brutality of man at fourteen.

Quite early De Boys had shown a taste for learning, and had dreams very far removed from the walls, turnip-fields, and potato-beds of Up-at-Battle's. He held very pronounced views on literary style, and wrote numerous sermons in the manner of Gibbon, which Jane considered far superior to anything achieved by that historian himself. In gayer moments he attempted blank verse (in the Miltonic strain), and composed two acts of a tragedy—"Julius Cæsar in Britain"—in which Jane declared

that Julius Cæsar sounded exactly like De Boys, particularly in a fine speech about women, which began, "*Hence, pampered minions, born of pride and folly,*" and ended, "*I scorn such soft-mouthed babblers.*" The third act (still unwritten) he assured her would be the most tremendous of the five.

His own observation, helped by hints from the neighbours, had taught him very soon that he was living on charity, and a sense of gratitude to the Battles, no less than his own self-pride, filled him with a desperate ambition to be independent, and make a name. His father had been that sad anomaly, an accountant with a literary faculty ; his mother was a poetess, who died in her effort to rhyme "love" with "drudgery." From both parents he inherited a desire for the vague, and a disgust for the tangible.

"Have you no pride?" he said to Jane one day, when she had seemed more amused than awed by his ambitious ideas.

"We must beware of pride," said Jane, who hoped she sounded humble,

"That is the right sort of pride —to feel that you come of honest people, and must bring no shame to them," said the boy, hotly. "I am not going to be the pauper of the family!"

"But you are a genius," said Jane. "How can you expect to be rich when you are a genius? I think you are very discontented."

De Boys sighed, but, remembering her good qualities as a fighter, pitied her weak sex and not her poor spirit.

Some months after the foregoing conversation, the curate of the parish, driven to his wits' end by the increasing wants of an increasing family, was inspired to offer young Mauden instruction in the Classics, in exchange for Miss Caroline's milk and butter. At first she had shrunk from this nefarious traffic in dairy produce and the Pagan authors, but no sooner had her common sense assured her, that the plan was hugely to the lad's advantage, than she became as strongly convinced of its innocence as she had been of its impiety. She soothed her father's

unreasonable prejudices, which were not in disfavour of learning as learning, but of the time wasted in its acquisition. If, as she pointed out, De Boys worked at his books when the rest of the family were sleeping, and *if* the curate had no better equivalent than Latin and Greek to offer in exchange for food, and *if* he was too proud to accept it as a gift—— Her opening statement alone occupied forty-five minutes. Battle, who had set his face against De Boys “poking out his eyes wi’ night work,” and could find no words to express his mean opinion of the dead languages as weighed against fresh butter, relented at the first harrowing picture conjured up to his imagination, by Miss Caroline’s ingenious hints of the curate’s half-fed family. Her last mournful prophecy that the unhappy man’s two girls would die of consumption before the year was out, and the baby have “rickets,” was so soul-piercing, that the worthy farmer not only gave his consent to the bargain in debate, but even admitted, that the curate might not be a prophet in sheep’s clothing of

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the type we are so expressly warned against in the Sermon on the Mount.

De Boys, whose burrs of knowledge picked up in the Town Library, and in the local "Academy for Young Gentlemen," had only served to tease alike his intellect and his spirit, saw a special Providence in the tutor, who was thus dropped, as it were, from heaven for his guidance. He hardly knew whither his thoughts and plans were leading him : the something ahead was so vague in outline, and so far away, that though he daily approached it nearer, it only seemed part of the general distance, the bit of high mountain beyond many mountains, many roads and valleys. For the present he only knew he must work—work early and late, never despairing, yet never hoping too high—striving to do his best, but leaving it for others to say how good that best might be. Had he a talent, and was it the one he most coveted in the world?—Would he ever be a scholar? At last one day, between blushes and stammers, he asked his tutor whether —after thirty years or so of close

application—he would know something. The Rev. Fitz Ormond O'Nelligan was one of those rare men, who, void of personal pretensions, are big with ambition for their friends. He slapped his pupil on the back with such force that had De Boys been a student of the weakling order, his earthly career would have ended on the spot.

" You will be the finest Grecian in England," he said—" that is to say, if ye'll only be patient. At the Universitees now, the cry is all for mere lads, and a text which Bentlee would have approached with awe and riverince, and given the best years of his loife too, is now cobbled up by any schoolboy in six weeks or less. Avoid all such immoralitee. Fasten your oies on the gloreeous examples of the past, and if you are not noticed by this generation, there will be some roise up in the future, who will call your memoree blessed."

" What for ? " said De Boys, who had fortunately mastered the art of grinning inside.

" For being the one scholar," said O'Nelligan, solemnly, " who had the humanitee to keep his

wisdom out of print, and who did not regard the great masterpieces of antiquitee as so many door-posts for every dog to defile. The simile is used by Erasmus."

This encouragement, delivered in O'Nelligan's most impressive manner (impossible to describe, and only to be imagined by those who may have encountered an Irishman with the blood of two kings, eighteen earls, and a Christian martyr in his veins), gave De Boys the self-confidence which he was too modest to assume on his own warrant. It must be owned, however, that his tutor's instruction was, though solid, excessively dull. The one consuming passion of O'Nelligan's life was grammar, and for his pupil's leisure moments he had invented a game on Comparative Syntax, which, in his judgment, transcended chess and threw whist on its death-bed. Mauden felt, therefore, to his own dismay, a something not wholly unlike relief when, after three years of hard reading, the excellent man confessed that he had taught him what he could, and that the time was now come for him to show his

mettle at the University. De Boys rushed home, and with characteristic impetuosity blurted out at the dinner-table that he was going to Oxford.

"What time do you start?" said the gentle Miss Caroline, who wondered whether his journey could have anything to do with the cow.

"To Oxford!" thundered his uncle. "To Oxford! This comes of listening to a curate's great swelling words of vanity. You know what the Apostle Paul saith, that those who *seemed* to be somewhat, in conference added nothing to him. Take heed by his experience. To Oxford! And what will you find there? The lust of the eye, the pride of life, and the vain pursuit of vainer knowledge. The wise using their wisdom to confound the weak, working, not to the glory of God, but for the amazement of the sinner; each man a law unto himself, and all in conflict with the powers that be. Let me hear no more blether about Oxford!"

Having finished his harangue, which he had delivered with such fluency that Miss Caroline suspected

it had long been prepared for some such crisis, he left the room. De Boys, a little pale but not less determined in expression, went about his usual afternoon employment, which, since it had all to do with the farm, made it seem as though "Up-at-Battle's" were, after all, the one reality in life, and his dream of a University career, a dream indeed, nay more, the very town of Oxford a figment of his imagination. At tea-time he did not feel hungry ; he walked instead to his favourite peak on the cliff, and sat there, gazing gloomily at the dancing sea. He was roused by a tap on his shoulder : he turned and saw Jane.





## CHAPTER II.

WHICH CONTAINS SOME SERIOUS  
VANITY.

JANE had started from home with her hair in a plait, but the wind, her quick walking, and her natural impatience of restraint, had shaken it free, and it now hung, neither curled nor crimped, yet far from straight, in one lively, glimmering mass below her waist. Her gown was of white cotton, and was so clean that it still smelt of the ironing-board, and so outgrown that it did not reach her ankles by an inch, —perhaps more. The ankles, however, were innocent, and did not fear the light of day. A wide-brimmed hat concealed the upper part of her face, and only left visible the tip of a lift-upward nose, a

round chin, and a finely-cut, but still childish mouth. Her cheeks and throat, though delicate in grain, were well browned, and while by no means rustic in mien, she looked what indeed she was—a daughter of the sun and rain. Jane was not beautiful ; or rather, there was too much strangeness in her beauty, to make her seem so at first sight : reddish hair and a dusky face make an odd combination. There was an atmosphere of strength and sweetness about her which swept over the heart-sick De Boys like a mountain breeze ; he drew a long breath, and wondered at the change in the weather.

"It is time to go home," he said. She swallowed her mortification : she had sought him in order to offer her sympathy.

"Why don't you go, then ?" she said, as promptly.

He made several thrusts at the meek earth with his heavy walking-stick. "You know," he said, "your grandfather does not like you to be out late."

"I can fight my own battles," said Jane, tossing her head.

De Boys shrugged his shoulders, and tried to frown down his rising colour ; he also turned on his heel and walked away.

"De Boys," she said, pursuing—  
"De Boys . . . I suppose you think I am a cat ? "

"I hate cats," he said, evasively.

"Do you hate *me* ? "

The pause which followed seemed borrowed from eternity.

"I could hate you," he said ;  
"but, as it happens, I do not."

"Do you think I am ugly ? All the girls say I am a fright !" Her smile had a crook at each end : one signified amusement, the other contempt.

"I have never thought about your looks," said De Boys, with more honesty than discretion. "I suppose you are all right. But in any case I would never call you hideous ! "

Jane had a longing to be thought pretty. Her ideal was the sweet portrait of a young lady (on porcelain) which hung in a photographer's window she knew of, and which represented a divine creature with blue eyes, pink cheeks, and

blonde hair, waved and parted Madonna-wise. If she might only look like that! She had a fatal admiration for the conventional type angelic, being neither old enough nor experienced enough to know, that holiness occasionally treads the human countenance on crow's feet.

"How do you like me best?" she said. "This way," (she showed her profile), "or *that* way?" (She looked him straight in the face).

He gazed. "Are your eyes blue or brown?" he said: "in some lights they are brown, but that may be the effect of your lashes."

"I think," she said, "they are blue."

"They remind me of purple heather," said De Boys, with a certain dreaminess.

"Good gracious!" said Jane, blushing.

"And your mouth," he went on, warming to the subject, "is—"

"My mouth is a straight line," she said, sharply. "And now we must make haste!" She started ahead and began to hum. The first strains were a reminiscence of

"Pleasant are Thy courts below," but, as the melody swelled, it found words which were De Boys's own, and which were these :—

"Love is a bubble,  
Love is a trouble,  
Love is a sigh,  
And love is a grin.  
Love is sweet honey,  
Love is cold money,  
Love is a lie,  
And love is a sin.

Love is a jig—  
So tread you a measure;  
Love is a dirge—  
So fill you with grief;  
Love is bright wine—  
To quicken your pleasure;  
Love's the North Wind—  
And Man the dead leaf."

This effusion had been rejected by the editor of the *Brentmore, Haddington, and Mertford Express* on the ground that it was "too reckless"; but Jane thought it extremely fine. Once, and only once in the course of her singing, she stole a glance at her companion.

De Boys was tall and straight, of careless but not awkward bearing.

In countenance he looked like a cherub who had talked long hours with Puck—his expression was at once so subtle, so artless, and so discreet. A chuckle lurked in the deep recesses of his eye, but the imp rarely ventured to the surface. His nose had an eager and inquiring air, as though it were ever scenting for an undiscovered country ; his beardless lips were pliant, and told his kind, pleasure-loving, and generous disposition.

He was the first to make a remark. "I have been thinking," he said, "what your mouth is like," he blushed—"it is like a kiss made incarnate."

"I hate kissing," said Jane, hurriedly. "I was not born under a kissing star. Kissing is silly."

"I fear it is," sighed De Boys.

"There is nothing to *fear*," said Jane. "But what does it mean, or what is the use of doing things which mean so little ? "

"I think," said De Boys, trying to look unprejudiced, "kissing might mean a great deal if—if the people cared for each other."

"Have you ever kissed any one

and meant a great deal?" said Jane, with anxiety.

De Boys glanced up at the sky. "The clouds are brooding," he said. "I would not wonder if it rained. No, it is not my custom to kiss women. I hate it quite as much as you do."

She seemed sceptical. "Ah," she said, "but men are different."

"How do *you* know," he said, quickly.

"I cannot say *how* I know it," she answered, "because I must have known it ever since I was born."

"Let us talk of something else," said De Boys.

"You began this. Kisses and all such nonsense never come into my head. I—I always skip the love-making in novels." She uttered this astonishing falsehood with cloudless eyes.

"Oh!" said De Boys.

"Why do you say 'oh'? I suppose you don't believe me. I do not care; if you wish to quarrel, quarrel. I will not say another word." She turned away her head, but De Boys heard the tears in her voice.

"Jane," he said, "I told you a lie just now. I once kissed Lizzie Cass, but it was very long ago."

"When?" said Jane.

"At the hay-making. She stood in my way, and, somehow—well, you know how these things happen!"

"No, I don't!" she said, with indignation.

"She isn't at all pretty; and it was only her ear! Your ears are like pink shells. But, unhappily, they never get in the way!"

"I should hope not," said Jane; "I want no kisses spared from Lizzie Casses!"

"Then, if I had not——"

"But you have," she said, "and that ends it."

"It was months ago," murmured De Boys, "and I have changed since then. Life looks differently."

"After all," said Jane, "you were very honest to own it. But as for Lizzie Cass, I always said she was a bold minx. She ought to be ashamed of herself!"

"Undoubtedly I was to blame. I ought not to have done it. I should have had more self-respect."

"Oh, well," said Jane, "it is a

girl's part to behave herself. But whenever there is kissing, either at the hay-making or at any other time, I have noticed that it is always some girl who starts it."

"That," said De Boys, "may be true. But you are not like other girls."

"De Boys," she said, faintly ; "please don't think I am better than I am. I deceived you just now ; I did not mean——"

His face grew hard, his voice cold, his eye was dismayed. "Do you mean," he said, "that you have told me a lie ? What was it about ? "

"Oh, forgive me," she said, half crying ; "I cannot think what made me say it. But it was not the truth —I do not always skip the love-making in novels."

He stalked on with darkened brows.

"You lied to me," he said ; "it is the principle I am thinking of. I never thought you *could* lie—even for a good purpose."

Jane put her lips together. "It was a little one," she murmured.

"Ah, but now I know you are at least capable of deceiving me, how can I ever trust you so absolutely

again?" His voice had a mournful cadence.

"I don't know," she said; "but—look at me."

To look at her were fatal, and he knew it. He stared undaunted and with resolution straight in front of him.

"Look at me!" she entreated.

"Why?"

"I want to see whether you are so angry as you sound."

"Angry is not the word," he said, "but grieved and disappointed. You were my Ideal."

She began to cry. "If you had told me I was your Ideal," she said, "I would have been more careful. It is so much easier to be ideal when you know that some one appreciates you."

Jane had not yet grasped the truth, that man is a spectacle for angels, and that he can carry his heroism, his noble sentiments, and his virtue into a wilderness, and still not feel that he is being heroic and sublime for nothing—a suspicion, however, which will assail him for more causes than he would care to count, if he look for mortal appraise-

ment only. But love is two-headed egoism, and to Jane the Ideal meant De Boys's ideas.

She continued—"I do not want you to think me perfect ; because I am not, and I could not be, even to please you. I am just like other girls."

"Well," said De Boys, at length, "perhaps I ought to be glad of anything that makes you more like me—that puts you nearer my level."

Jane looked troubled ; she was beginning to realise, though dimly, the responsibilities of an Ideal.

"De Boys," she said, "did you ever think that I was better than yourself?"

"Better ! It was not a question of comparison at all."

"And now," said Jane—"what do you think now ? "

He hesitated. "And *now?*" she asked again. They had reached a gate which led into a kind of shrubbery. As she passed through, her skirt caught on one of the spikes. He was awkward and slow at releasing her, and when they started to walk again, he lagged behind.

"Are you tired ? " said Jane.

"No."

"Are you angry?"

"Yes."

"Very well; then we are not friends. But I would rather be so than have deceit between us. And you may as well know the worst of me at once. I am much plainer in the face than you think. Take a good look at me this way."

She pulled off her hat, tugged back her magnificent hair, and in her anxiety to appear at her worst, all but made a grimace. De Boys did not seem so repelled as she had expected.

"Take a good look," she repeated, faintly. "I shall never have the courage to do this again."

"I am angry," he said, looking, "because I hate myself and because you are still as far above me as—"

She advanced a step towards him. "I am not above you, De Boys," she said, "I am *here*."

He needed no second reminder, but with the agility of a practised lover, caught her in his arms and kissed her at random, and with an ardour, which, though wholly beyond the measure of her own childish

affection, filled her with nameless fear.

"There!" he said; "but don't ask me to look at you again. That's kissing."

Jane fixed her eyes on his with something like reproach. "I was happier before," she said; "much happier. I almost wish you had not."

"But I love you," said De Boys.

"Still," said Jane, "I wish you had not. I shall remember it."

"So shall I," said De Boys.

"But I only want to remember that I love you," said Jane; "and I want to remember it without distractions, and without kisses, which, after all, may only mean that I am standing in your way."

"Dearest!"

"Yet I am glad," she went on—  
"I am glad God made me a woman."

"Why?"

"That you might love me."

Once more a spell was in the air, but this time she had experience.

"Come," she said, quickly, "we shall be late, and the geese will want their supper."

Even thus does prose trample on the skirts of passion. They hurried on into the gathering twilight, on and on. At the hill they joined hands and ran, kicking, in imagination, the world (of their imagination), in front of them as they went.





## CHAPTER III.

TOUCHING THE MASCULINE CONSCIENCE AND THE FEMININE REASON.

**F**ARMER BATTLE, meanwhile, had retired to the solitude of his own chamber, to review a domestic situation, which, as Miss Caroline had rightly guessed, he had foreseen, and to some extent prepared for. It may be, however, that he had overlooked the serious difficulties of the case, in the seemly joy of composing a speech which would crush it; at all events, he saw plainly enough now, that the trouble, so far from being ended, had only begun. The outlook perplexed, worried, and distressed him more than his dignity was willing, but as his nerves soon

forced him, to admit. His first act, therefore, on reaching his room was to pour out and swallow a large dose of a noxious preparation known as *Gump's Elixir*, and, as he was able to gulp this down with comparatively few qualms, it assured him, that his system could still endure the most extraordinary and violent shocks without surrender.

But though he could recall the physical man to duty, his mind remained in rebellion, and he sat down, with his body forward, his arms resting on his knees, and his hands clasped, the picture of doubt and embarrassment. He was a man of governed but primitive emotions, and knew nothing of the thousand-and-one complications and combinations, which the cultured mind can make out of one rough passion chopped into polished fragments. His love was love, and his hate was hate, and his rage was rage: to excite either one was like pulling out the stop of an organ.

Like most proud men he was extremely sensitive, and he had been quick to notice his nephew's

want of interest in farm matters and the comfortable home—the home which Battle himself had spent his days in making, and which was the crown of his earthly labours. The old man did not desire—nor indeed could he conceive—a greater happiness than to stand in his porch, and see the smoke rising from his tenants' chimney-pots, to gaze at the fine barn (once a miserable cowshed), at the dairy, and at the model hen-house built after his own design, with a patent door ! Every twig and every stone on the estate had its value and association for him ; every inch of the ground knew his tread ; every corner, nook, and cranny stood for something in the sum of his experience. But De Boys could sit opposite the barn with his nose in a book ; he accepted the dairy as a matter of course ; he talked of crops and prize bullocks as though land which did *not* yield crops, and bullocks which did *not* win prizes were things unheard of ; he ate his good fare and slept between linen sheets, not with gratitude, but as though he would

have been very scurvily treated if he did not have such luxuries.

All this was a never-failing source of bitterness to the old man : what he gave he gave liberally ; he only asked, when his gifts were accepted so freely, that he should be remembered with like readiness as the giver. There was certainly nothing unreasonable in this desire ; it was a very natural craving for some recognition of the toil and endeavour, the heart-aches and struggles which had gone to the making of his—as it must to every man's—success. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, and if it is the weak and the slow who win, how is it done save by the most painful efforts, the sternest self-discipline, the most dogged courage, and the most touching patience ? Battle, unable to analyse his feelings, was only conscious that he had fought a hard fight for sixty odd years, was still fighting, and not one member of his family showed, nor ever had shown, the smallest knowledge of it. The women he forgave, for two (his wife and his eldest daughter)

were dead, one was a careful house-wife, and the other, a slip of a girl, but De Boys—he could not forgive De Boys. That his experience was the common one of many husbands and fathers only aggravated the wound : he wished, in pardonable if foolish pride, to think that his family were altogether exceptional, patterns of goodness, sobriety, discretion and—quality so necessary to domestic comfort—obedience.

Much, no doubt, was to be said for the farmer, but De Boys was not without defence. He had appeared on the scene when things were prosperous, and he was still an untravelled youth of twenty ; he was therefore quite unable to contrast the old farm with the new, or properly estimate a force of character which he could only know to be uncommon, by mixing with the world. In De Boys's green judgment all elderly relatives were severe, a shade despotic, and a little too religious ; all women mended socks, made incomparable pies, and scolded incessantly ; all girls spent too much time *titivating*, were feeble in argument, yet

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pleasing enough in their way. These opinions he expressed with much confidence, and, boy-like, was so proud of his power of criticism, that he forgot he was directing it against the beings he loved best in the world. Boy-like, too, he was not only very shy of showing his affection, but he did not even know that he had it. Healthy-minded lads do not sit brooding over their instincts till they are hatched into Christian virtues and deadly sins : their conscience warns them which to follow and which to shun, but the why, the wherefore, and the psychological meaning of it all does not trouble them in the least. Thus, while De Boys would have defended his uncle with the last drop of blood in his body, he would not have been able to say just why. From this it will be seen, how far the farmer and the aspiring scholar were from a mutual understanding.

Battle's strongest impulse, after the scene at the dinner-table, was to order an immediate bonfire of all the Pagan authors in the house, and if it had been in his power to include the curate among them, it

is not hard to guess how he would have dealt with that aimable gentleman. To think that De Boys should prefer the example of a weak-kneed parson (who could hardly keep his own body and soul together), before that of his lawful guardian, whose flourishing circumstances were the best possible proof of his fitness to advise! Yet De Boys was a clever lad, apt and well-spoken—if he liked books better than the fields, he had inherited the taste from his pitiable father. For a moment Battle wavered. If he could call to mind one, even one, scholar who was able to show *gumption* at a crisis and keep a family in comfort, he would let the boy go his own gait. He was searching his experience for such a prodigy when a doubt assailed him : was not learning sinful? He consulted the third chapter of Genesis and read no further. Evidently, knowledge was not for man.

The farmer's relief was unbounded : he could not only make a virtue of his own ignorance, but stand opposed to his nephew on the vantage-ground of a great

moral principle. He had a text—“*Ye shall not eat of it*”; he could not be held responsible for the hard sayings of Scripture, *his* only duty was to expound, and, when necessary, enforce them. His mind was fixed : he had settled the matter for ever—there should be no more weak relenting, no more teasing of conscience. He knelt down by his bed, and, thanking God for giving him light on the subject, was studiously careful not to ask Him for *more*: he even besought the Almighty to restrain his eyes from wandering to other texts, which might seem to contradict the sound doctrine of the one before him. He wound up by hinting, that if the Almighty saw fit to remove the Rev. Fitz Ormond O’Nelligan to another parish—or sphere—he (Samuel Battle) could only admire His divine wisdom and clemency. Strengthened and refreshed by this prayer, he rose from his knees, and, almost smiling, opened the door at which Miss Caroline had been softly tapping for some seconds.

“ Well ? ” he said.

Miss Caroline studied his face

with a half-fearful, half-imploring expression. She had come to make intercession for young Mauden.

"I want to say something about the boy," she began. If the circumstances were ordinary, her heart, at all events, was heroic, and it is the heart which makes the situation.

"There is nothing to be said," said her father, sternly; "leave him to me. There has been enough of women's meddling as it is."

"I have a notion," she faltered.

"A notion! The whole house is swarming wi' notions. A man cannot sleep nor eat for them: they sour the milk and turn his bread to ashes; they confront him on his threshold and break in upon his converse with the Lord"—here he fixed his iron-grey eye on Miss Caroline—"they make his own flesh and blood a heaviness and his children's children as vipers!"

"The Lord forbid that a notion o' mine should work such mischief!" said Miss Caroline, drawing down her lip.

"I have no fault to find wi' you, Caroline," said Battle, in a milder tone, "but I do say that you ha'

pampered that boy till he's fit for nought, but to sip tea wi' curates, and lose his liver seeking after lost Niobes!"

He had once overheard a brief conversation between O'Neilligan and Mauden, in the course of which they had referred to the lost Niobe of *Æschylus*. This mystery, Battle had no doubt, was a heathen god whom the world was all the richer for losing. "The difference," he went on, "so far as I can see between a man wi' notions and a man without 'em is this—*the man without 'em pays the bill!*"

"I see no harm in book-learning," said Miss Caroline, firmly; "we are told to add to faith, virtue, and to virtue, knowledge, and——"

Her father waved his hand. "Beware of twisting the Word of God," he said, hurriedly; "there's no telling what mischief may come of perking up on a false meaning. I don't hold wi' women quoting texts," he added, "and I doubt the wisdom of dragging Scripture in by the ears whether it will or no. Ten to one if it don't bite you for your pains!"

"Aye!" said Miss Caroline, "and for that reason ministers should have learning." She drew a long breath and flushed. "Why shouldn't De Boys be a minister?"

Battle plunged into thought. He never, in his own phrase, "fooled round the edge of an idea."

"A minister!" he said, at last. "What sort of a minister? If De Boys is the kind to be yanked about by deacons he hasn't much of the Battle stock in him!"

"There's room for all in the Church of England," said Miss Caroline. "A doctrine or two needn't stand in a man's way. What's doctrine? Why should De Boys call himself a Dissenter and spoil his chances, poor lad, when he might just as well be Broad and hold his own wi' the best? When folks begin to quarrel about doctrine they are really spearin' at politics. Any fool knows that!"

"I will think it over," said Battle; "but I could never see bone of my bone picked bare by deacons. Whenever I see a deacon I always think of the roaring lion seeking whom he can devour. Look at

Hoadley—a pleasant enough man till they made him senior deacon. There's very few men, Caroline, that can bear authority if they haven't been born with the shoulders for it. If you gave a man a nose who had never had one, he would be blowing it all day. If De Boys can see his way to do without deacons—well, I will think it over."

Miss Caroline went downstairs, scolded the dairymaid on general grounds, called Jane to task for tearing her frock the Sunday before, hinted of dead parents turning in their grave, made a pudding with as little sugar as possible, and finally withdrew to her own room, where she indulged in a good cry. Heroism has a reaction.

Battle, however, had been so fascinated by the idea of De Boys entering the Church and "coming the Rectory" on his own account, that when his daughter had left him, he once more opened his Bible and found his thumb on the following sentence in Isaiah—" *Their strength is to sit still.*"

"The Lord's will be done," he murmured. "It is not for me to

thwart the working of the Spirit. If the boy's call is to the ministry, he must obey it ! ”

It would be tedious to recapitulate the numerous consultations, plans, and hopes of which De Boys was the object, not only for days, but for weeks following. At first he had been tempted to quarrel with the profession so suddenly forced upon him : his religion, like the religion of the young, was an untried force, and, as his idea of God was somehow associated with his Uncle Battle, it was largely tempered with unutterable private opinions. But though he had often questioned the infallible justice of the Almighty (with regard to fishing on Sundays and the like), his faith was so knit in his bones that it was more valuable as a ruling principle than any wider creed, based on the mere mental acceptance of doctrinal truths. The fear of God was before his eyes ; the prospect, therefore, of becoming His minister put no strain on his sincerity. If it failed to stir his enthusiasm it was because his easy-

going nature hung aloof from the self-denial and hard work which, oddly enough, he conceived to be a clergyman's portion.

Where his books had formerly been ordered aside for the most trivial domestic duty, he was now frowned at if he ventured to look up from them ; if he showed the smallest disposition to levity, the farmer would remind him that it was time to put away childish things and reflect on the dignity of his calling : at his approach gossip was silenced, and Baptismal Regeneration, Predestination, and Justification by Faith became the lively topics of conversation ; if he betrayed even the mildest interest in "new trouserings," references would be made to Demas, who loved the things of this world, and to the young man who had great possessions. He began to see that a reputation for virtue and wisdom (however gratifying to one's vanity), brings with it pains and penalties so various, so exquisite, and so incessant, that Job himself would seem a false type of persecuted excellence, since he lived longer than his plagues. De Boys's

patience, at no time of remarkable endurance, would not have lasted under the petty but fretting annoyances which now formed his daily lot, and which promised to grow in severity as he advanced in grace, if his determination to go to Oxford had not been made with a firm resolve to suffer all things rather than fail to fulfil it. When the time came to leave home, he went with a sigh of relief so heartfelt, that Miss Caroline mistook it for a sob.

"The plum-cake is just inside the bag," she whispered, "but the currant wine is at the bottom of the box. I didn't put it on top because —as you are going to be a minister —it would not look well if the lid flew open!"

He heard no more, for the driver whipped up his horse, and, followed by tears, blessings, exhortations, and warnings, he rode off in the market cart towards fame and the railway station. He was so lost in fair dreams of the future that he did not notice Jane, who, by running across the fields and jumping a few ditches, had managed to reach a

certain tree which commanded a fine view of the high-road. This she had climbed, and there she sat on a branch waiting for him to pass.

But while he did not see her for dreaming, she could not see him for tears. Thus her long run, and her jumps, and her climb were for nothing.

De Boys, however, had wished her farewell the night before, and he had felt the parting to the best of his ability. He still felt it—dear, sweet little Jane! (she was tall)—but now other matters were naturally foremost in his mind. Jane, woman-like, utterly unable to understand this, thought him very unloving, and decided to waste no more of her affection where it was not wanted. She was young—but seventeen in fact, impulsive, wilful, passionately fond of romances, but singularly practical in her criticism of life: weeping for her heroines as heroines, yet scorning them not seldom as fools, admiring the heroes, yet finding much to be said for the villains, and displaying, for her age, sex, and inexperience, an unusual desire for strict—indeed

rigorous—justice. Even now, smarting under De Boys's fancied indifference, she blamed her own poverty of attractions, not his callousness, which, since she promised—to the seeing eye—to be a beautiful woman, was as wrong-headed and feminine as it well could be.

As the days dragged on she realised how much De Boys had been to her, how much of her supposed independence had rested on his support, how much her courage had fed on his sympathy, how everything in her mind which gave her the smallest satisfaction was not her own at all, but borrowed from him. And now he was gone, it seemed as though the earth which she trampled on as a right, had suddenly slipped away, and left her without a footing, to sink, and sink, and sink, as one does in a nightmare. At first she saw a substitute for De Boys in a tow-headed youth who sang in the chapel choir, and she talked to him of the books she read, as she would to her lover, only to grow absent-minded, however, and wake to catch an unsympathetic and wondering eye : phrases,

jokes, and little words full of meaning to herself and De Boys lost all their point when exchanged with her few friends in the village, and very soon she learnt the absolute dissimilarity in minds, and how very little except weakness one human being has in common with another.

Jane had always found such balm for all her small troubles in being understood by De Boys, which meant, no doubt, that he saw no fault in her, and made a grace out of every shortcoming—that is to say, where her shortcomings affected others. He made nicer distinctions in her offences against himself. But in her dealings with the world at large he always proved her in the right, even when she knew herself in the wrong, and thus when she least agreed with him, he was most consoling. True, now he was absent, he wrote to her, but the letters were for family perusal, and even though "*Do not forget the guinea-pig,*" stood for "*My very dearest, how I long to see you,*" it was a flimsy substitute for a love-letter, her own, and bristling with "dearests" in

plain English. Gradually restraint showed itself in her replies: the guinea-pig untimely died, De Boys adopted a more learned tone, Jane found him more difficult to answer, she doubted whether she loved him, and grew pale at the doubt; spent whole hours trying to prove that she was perfectly happy without him, and whole nights crying because she was not.

When she heard that he did not intend to return home till the end of his third term, she made no comment, but brought her lips so sharply together, that they lost their look of childish indecision for all time.





## CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH ONE LADY TRIES NATURE,  
WHILE TWO, DISCUSS HUMANITY.

ONE afternoon, in the following long vacation, a lady was gathering honeysuckle from a hedge in a field near St. Albans. She wore a pink cambric *confection*, artfully relieved with old Honiton : with one hand she held up her skirt and discovered a most elaborate silk petticoat ; on the ground by her side was a lace parasol and a pair of long kid gloves. A hat, garnished with velvet orchids and silk dandelions, shaded her face, and was tied under her chin with pale green ribbons ; her hair, which was black and very abundant, was loosely caught up by a silver comb. In figure she was tall and gracious, but one could

have wished that her hips had more of a jut and her shoulders less an air of almost masculine resolution. She had too much distinction to be fashionable and too much style to be stylish : beyond any doubt she was a personage.

She had filled her basket with the flowers when her eyes fell on a fine spray just beyond her reach. The branch of a tree hung over the hedge, and, by supporting herself on this, she thought it might be possible to clutch at the prize. She was about to spring, when she was startled by the sight of a young man running towards her from the adjoining paddock. Unobserved, he had been watching her for some indefinite space of time.

"Pardon me," he said, lifting his hat, "but I fear you do not see that the bough is broken."

"No," she said, with a baffling smile, "I only saw the honeysuckle!"

He looked at her, knit his brows, bit his lips, and then laughed. "So you only saw the honeysuckle," he said; "your point of view is magnificent!" He had not intended to

speak so familiarly, but she reminded him so strangely, yet with so little reason, of a certain Jane Shannon he knew of, that he felt they were already well acquainted. The lady, however, unaware of her resemblance to Jane Shannon, gave him a severe look.

"I never thought I could meet any one," she said; "I did not know that there was any one in Whetstone to meet. Besides, this is not the high-road." There was a note of haughtiness in her tone, and her large, black eyes wandered, apparently by chance, to a large notice which faced them both—  
*"Trespassers will be Prosecuted."*

"I am a stranger here," said the youth, flushing; "they told me at the station that I could get to The Cloisters by crossing these fields. I saw you were in danger, so I spoke."

He took off his hat and turned ever so slightly to go on. When a man is at most pains to conceal his admiration for a woman, he can be most sure that she appreciates his struggle to her finger-tips. The lady instinctively pushed back her

hat, and gave him a longer, perhaps a kinder, glance ; he remained.

She had a face of such spiritual liveliness that its merely natural charms of feature and colouring, only seized on second thoughts. They were the thin veil over a sparkling radiance, which, whether it were due to virtue, or wit, or coquetry, was too dazzling for Speculation—aged twenty-one and a son of Adam.

"Did I understand you to say," she said, "that you were on your way to The Cloisters ? "

"Yes," he replied.

"Then you must be De Boys Mauden." (He bowed.) "I am Sophia Jenyns."

"What !" he exclaimed, "the new Lady Macbeth ? "

"The newest," she said, drily. "You must know," she continued, wondering at Mauden's extreme astonishment, yet pleased, for she could translate all things into flattery—"you must know that I came out to gather honeysuckle this afternoon, because I wanted to see whether I would be happier if I were more like the primitive

woman. Every one is talking about nature, so I thought I would try it. I have been so bored : I longed to be at home reading Hardy, or St. Augustine, or Hegel, or *somebody*."

"Do you read Hegel ?" he said.

"I read everything," she replied, "don't you ?"

"No," he said, and looked gratefully at heaven.

This young lady who was so far from philosophy that she tried nature, and so far from nature that she longed for philosophy, chuckled and picked up her flower-basket.

"You Oxford men," she said, "are more proud of what you have *not* read than of what you *have* read. Come, we can walk to The Cloisters together. I hope you like Lady Hyde-Bassett as well as I do."

"I should like her better if I thought she had a heart: no woman with a heart could have married Sir Benjamin."

"Did you know him ?" said Sophia.

"No," said De Boys ; "but every one says he was the most disagree-

able man in the world ; so forbidding and curt and unapproachable."

"I thought so once," said Sophia, "till one day, when I was a child, I heard him talking to Lady Hyde-Bassett. I suppose they thought I was too little to understand them. They were walking in the garden and he asked her whether she would rather be a pussy cat or a catty puss, and she pinched his arm, and said he was a good little thing, and it was a pity that some of the old fossils he knew could not hear him. And he said, very solemnly, 'God forbid !' and she kissed his hand and said he was an angel, but she wished he would buy a new hat, although he could only look lovely if he wore pyjamas and a billy-cock ! And he said, 'For God's sake, don't talk so loud !' and she said, 'Let us both say Damn with all our might, and then I will be quiet.' And they said Damn, and she was quiet, and then they began to talk about Aristotle. That," she wound up, "is a real celebrity really At Home. So you see all scholars do not talk like Casaubon in 'Middlemarch' ; they have their flippant moments,

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and get horribly tired of being great!"

No written account of Miss Sophia Jenyns's artless prattle could convey her melodious voice, grace of gesture, dramatic force, and facial expression. De Boys watched her, entranced ; it was his first direct encounter with spontaneous genius. And then her fatal, too delicious resemblance to Jane ! he could adore her for that alone. She led the way and he followed : a Will o' the Wisp would have been a safer guide.

Lady Hyde-Bassett was an American by birth, and had received her education in France. After much travelling and many flirtations she had married, at the age of two-and-twenty, the distinguished invalid and philologist, Sir Benjamin Bassett.

The *Hyde* was an inspiration attached to a small property which he had inherited towards the close of his last illness. The marriage had been eminently happy, but before the Society of Antiquaries had ceased to wonder at the devotion of so young and modish a woman to the apparently grim, the

certainly middle-aged, and, by inference, dull hieroglyphic, he died. His widow's grief was of the desperate order, but, possessing ample means, she was able to wreak it by building a marble tomb over his bones, and founding a Hyde-Bassett Scholarship for Greek Verse. To perpetuate the deceased gentleman's tolerant and unprejudiced temper she also endowed, with equal generosity, a Roman Catholic School, a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, and a Mission for the Suppression of Secret Societies. When pressed to give her reason for subscribing to the latter, she said that Sir Benjamin, to his sorrow, had belonged to one. "But," she added, "the rest is silence." With accomplishments which only wanted an occasion to reorganise Europe — or destroy it — she preferred to live in retirement and make matches, comparable only to Diocletian, who found (if we may believe him) greater happiness in planting cabbages than in ruling the Empire of Rome. Her country house, known as "The Cloisters, near St. Albans," was, as it were, a home of rest for

the most eminent in science, politics, art, and literature of her day, for, from her intimate knowledge of one genius, she never committed the error of making them seem common, by entertaining more than one—of his particular sphere—at a time. The distinguished person, therefore, who accepted her hospitality, never laboured under the unspeakable apprehension of encountering either his nearest match, or worse, his horrid better.

Now while Miss Sophia Jenyns, of the *Parnassus*, was gathering honeysuckle, her ladyship was reading "The Logic of Hegel." The room in which she sat was large, and breathed a sweet odour of peace and good housewifery. Its furniture, hangings, and decoration, though rich, were of a modest and even severe character, forasmuch as the cushions, coverings, footstools, screens, lamp-shades, photographs, and gew-gaws appurtenant to a modern boudoir were comfortable and pleasing by their absence.

"*Man is evil by nature,*" she read, "*and it is an error to imagine that he could ever be*

*otherwise. To such extent as man is and acts like a creature of nature to that extent his whole position and behaviour is wrong. Nature is for man only the starting-point which he must transform to something better. The theological doctrine of Original Sin is a profound truth."*

She sighed, and looked up from her book to gaze into a small silver-framed mirror which stood on the table by her side. Her complexion was pale, her eyes brown, and her hair prematurely grey. Some of her lady friends said they *believed* she thought she looked like Marie Antoinette. Her years were thirty-five, but a life of assiduous self-discipline and self-culture (glorified selfishness, in fact) had given her the calmness and dignity associated with the idea—if not the reality—of old age. A woman so finished in manner, dress, and bearing could only be called artificial in comparison with the ordinary type, in the sense that one might so describe a sonnet as differing from a folk-song.

Meanwhile, the leaves of Hegel were fluttering. Margaret, with a

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sigh, wrenched her eyes from the mirror and fastened them once more on "Original Sin." But again she read no further, for a lady entered the room.

Miss Bellarmine was not a maiden lady of that pathetic type who pour out tea and who have once loved. She was tall and of commanding appearance : her figure was considered purely Greek. (Perhaps this was because she had the good taste to drape it with Parisian millinery of modern date.) She had really beautiful features if one examined them separately, but as a whole they appeared out of drawing, as though they had been picked off various antique divinities, and stuck on her face at random. Thus, her nose began too soon, and her mouth ended too late ; whilst her eyes, charming in colour and shape, were so placed that they offered one a constant temptation to shift them either higher or lower. Her expression was neutral, for her character, like that of many Englishwomen, slumbered behind her countenance like a dog in its kennel, to come out growling or

amiable as circumstances might demand. She was highly accomplished, and spoke five languages with one well-bred accent. Theology was her recreation, but Villon the serious study of her life. Her notes on this poet promised to be the most exhaustive possible, and "Bellarmine on Villon," it was said, would be read like Coke on Lyttleton, as much for the commentary as the text.

"I am so glad to find you alone," she said. "Sophia Jenyns has gone out for what she calls a prowl, and Wrath is playing Bach in the music-room. What a gifted man! What is the relationship between them, dear? I have heard every impossible explanation."

Eliza Bellarmine was a discreet, cold-blooded person who could meet Nature face to face without blushing, and wink at the frailties of Culture. Lady Hyde-Bassett, on the other hand, would only see evil where she wished to see it: when she met unpleasant truths she rode off on what she called her instincts, and they carried her like Barbary

mares. She did not reply to her friend's question immediately.

"There is no truth in the story," she said, at last.

"I have heard," said Miss Bellarmine, "that there is more than truth—there are diamonds!"

"I thought, Eliza, you were above such littlenesses! Sophia Jenyns is the most pure-minded woman I know. She is not like other geniuses—she is different."

"They are all different—with a sameness. I have known thirty, and they were all pure-minded, and had, at least, three husbands and an episode!"

"We must not judge them," murmured her ladyship; "they are so fascinating, and their husbands are always so brutal."

"The artistic temperament," said Miss Bellarmine, in measured tones—"the artistic temperament is only faithful for the purposes of local colour—to *experience* fidelity, in fact. Then the next step is to gain some insight into infidelity. Unless a genius is extremely religious she is foredoomed to impropriety!"

"Eliza," said Lady Hyde-Bassett,

"you have neither humour nor imagination."

"None," said that lady, with conscious pride.

"And yet you are editing a poet!"

The commentator smiled, which the poet, could he have been present, would not have done.

"But," said Miss Bellarmine, who never left a subject unsifted, "you have not explained the relationship."

"Wrath adopted Sophia when she was only four days old: her father committed suicide, and her mother died when she was born. I blush for human nature when I hear a man so maligned for a kind action. He must have been very poor at the time, for he had only just sold his 'Antigone.'"

"I know all that," said Eliza; "and it was very noble on his part, and all the rest of it. But Sophia is no longer four days old!"

"If they cared for each other, is there any earthly reason why they should not marry?"

"Certainly. He may have a lunatic wife locked away somewhere, or,

in his extreme youth, he may have married some low person who is too respectable to divorce : nothing is more likely. I am very sorry for Sophia Jenyns, and more sorry for him ; but I think they should either be frank, or separate. If they think they are wrong, they should bid each other good-bye, but if they feel they are right, they should have the courage of their opinion. I could respect them then, although I might disagree with their conscience. As it is—well, they evidently know they are doing wrong, since they dare not be candid. And they must be wretched ! He is far too honest a man not to be miserable in a false position."

"I have listened, dear," said Lady Hyde-Bassett, "because your sentiments are so excellent. But—first swear you will never tell ! "

"I cannot give my word blindly."

"Then I will not tell you."

"Have I ever betrayed your confidence ? "

"Never," said her ladyship ; "but —this is a most profound secret."

"In that case perhaps you ought not to repeat it."

"You are so aggravating, Eliza ! Shall I tell you ? "

"That is a matter for your own judgment."

"Never breathe it to a soul ! Wrath and Sophia have been married for two years."

"You astonish me," said Eliza, at last, but without moving a muscle—"you astonish me greatly. . . . But I am inexpressibly relieved to hear it. . . . Any children ? "

"No," said Lady Hyde-Bassett ; "so it could not have been on that account. . . . But now," she went on, "we must talk of something else : it would be very awkward if either of them came suddenly in. Have I told you about De Boys Mauden ? He has just won my scholarship : a most brilliant young fellow ; they say he will be another Porson. But he has been over-working, and the doctor has insisted on his taking a rest. So I have made him come here. I sent the brougham for him, but he told Biffin he preferred to walk. He cannot know the way, and, man-like, would probably rather perish

than ask any one to direct him!"

"I shall be most interested to make his acquaintance—most interested. I know his name quite well." She did not as a matter of fact, but as a matter of principle a commentator and an occasional contributor to the learned reviews, could not be ignorant of the existence of a future Porson.

"He is very handsome," said her ladyship; adding, after a pause, "when he has got his degree I shall let him revise and augment all Benjamin's unpublished manuscripts. I began them myself, but my Greek is too Homeric!"

"Mr. Mauden," announced the footman.





## CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH A LADY HAS A TANTRUM,  
AND A GENTLEMAN PLAYS A FUGUE.

**S**Ophia Jenyns had parted company with De Boys in the hall, and was now hurrying towards the music-room, where Wrath was playing a fugue in masterly style. But Sophia was in no mood for harmony. She burst open the door, flounced in, and put her arms round her husband's neck.

"Tom," she said, "I have been reconsidering what you said this morning about making our marriage public. I know myself so well that I am sure I could never love you again if you did. There is not a correct bone in my body : it would kill me to be called Mrs. Wrath—simply kill me. I adore you and

worship you and idolise you, although you are my husband. That I cannot help ; but to let other people know it—oh, intolerable ! I will *not* be a British matron. I will *not* be called virtuous. It is no one's business whether I am married or not—a lot of fussy, prying, evil-minded old women—let them talk ! I think of them when I say, '*I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry*'—no wonder I make the whole house creep ! Buh ! And, Tom—you fascinating, lovely, wonderful creature, I have just been flirting with all my might, and by to-morrow I shall be madly in love ! Compared with you he is a monster, but in your absence he does very well. He is already quoting Spenser, and his voice is agreeable. Tell me you worship me, and I will tell you the rest ! "

" Why don't you flirt with me, dearest, and leave these young fellows to their work ? "

" My soul," said his wife, " my heart of hearts, you are the dullest person to flirt with I ever met. I never flirted with you in my life : I

half-tried it once by pretending to love you. But I found it too easy to pretend—hence our hideous, in-artistic marriage certificate! Never refer to it if you have any regard for my self-respect."

"Sophia, seriously——"

"I will not be glared at, nor frowned at! How handsome you are! If you were not my husband I would elope with you to-morrow. What a mercy I met you before I saw any one else. If I had met you too late—oh, if I had met you too late——" She paused. "I am afraid I would not have called it too late!"

"This is all very pretty," said Wrath, "and you are, no doubt, very adorable. But you must behave yourself; other people do not understand you as I do."

He was about eight-and-forty, and looked older. His features, though fine, were irregular; his poetic brow, his large and eminently practical nose, the unrest in his dark eyes, and the stillness about his mouth betokened him the possessor of an unusually complex disposition. He was an extremely handsome

man, yet such was his simplicity, that not all his wife's flatteries could convince him that he was other than plain. The absence of personal vanity in an eminently self-conscious age, when every hero sings his own epic, had the curious effect of making many people accept him at his own estimate : they argued, from their own experience, that a person who was not his own greatest admirer could not possess admirable characteristics.

"But seriously," he said, secretly enjoying his wife's brilliant, ever-varying countenance — from the artistic point of view she was a constant joy—"quite seriously. You must be guided by my knowledge of the world. I must announce the marriage, and so put an end to this revolting gossip ! "

"Revolting gossip does not matter : only facts are fatal—simply disastrous. Do not expose me to the humiliation of being publicly branded as an honest woman ! "

His mouth twitched : there was always too much sadness in Sophia's jesting to make it downright laughable.

"While people can talk about us," she went on, "we give them an opportunity to show their charitable views of human nature, and so they encourage us ; but if they once knew the truth, no one would care to see me act, and your pictures would be called dull, I know ! "

"Where," he said, "do you learn this cynicism ? It afflicts me beyond words : it is utterly false, utterly corrupt, utterly disgusting. You certainly do not hear it from Lady Hyde-Bassett."

She glanced at him swiftly, and as swiftly glanced away. He had coloured a little—no doubt from annoyance.

"Lady Hyde-Bassett has not lived my life," she said, catching her breath ; "she was not born a pauper ! Her father was not starved out of his wits, and her mother did not dance herself to death for a pound a week."

"Sophia ! "

"Oh, I know you have always been very kind to me. I am not ungrateful."

"Do you talk of gratitude—to me ? "

"I will talk of anything I like to anybody! . . . Have you asked Margaret to sit for the Madonna?"

"I have asked her to give me a sitting or two—yes. But it is merely for the shape of her face: it would not be a portrait. Pray be careful how you refer to the matter, because I was studiously careful to explain that I could not paint the Madonna from any woman in the world. It merely struck me that Marg—— that Lady Hyde-Bassett's face was peculiarly——"

"Fiddlesticks!"

"If you are going to be peevish, I think we had better not talk."

"You are very unkind to me. And I have a frightful headache: I can hardly see. I am sure this place is unhealthy. . . . I was only thinking, why trouble Margaret to sit, if you are *not* going to make the picture like her? What would be her object in sitting?—she might as well be a lay-figure at once. I am afraid she will feel insulted."

"She seemed to perfectly realise what I meant, and was very amiable about it."

"Naturally! She could hardly let

you see that she was annoyed—in her own house, and when you are a guest! . . . Why can't I sit for you?"

"Your type, you know, dearest, is—is not conventionally religious. You are most beautiful, but——"

"I would do very well, I suppose, for the Woman taken in Adultery!"

"I have never seen you like this before."

"Perhaps not. Thank God, I don't sit with my mouth screwed in one perpetual simper, looking religious, and wondering whether my new gowns will fit! I want you to understand that I have got a soul! and a mind! and individuality!"

He sighed and returned to his playing; but there was no spirit in his performance.

"You are not to tell Margaret of our marriage," said Sophia, suddenly; "when I get ready, I will tell her myself."

He flushed again, and this time more decidedly. Unfortunately, he had informed her ladyship of his happy condition that very afternoon—in a burst of friendly confidence—after she had promised to

sit for the Madonna. Could the circumstances be more awkward?

"Do you think she suspects?" said Sophia. But women have a fatal genius for answering their own questions. Before her husband could reply she went on, "I do not see how she can; I have always been very careful."

"Sophia," he began, intending to make a clean breast of the matter, "the fact is——"

She stamped her foot—a beautiful foot, too, another artistic joy. "I *loathe* facts; I will have my own way about it. You promised me that I could keep it a secret as long as I wished."

"I know that," he replied, "but you said this morning——"

"I am always being told what I said this morning! Never mind what I said six hours ago: it is the afternoon now. I suppose I may change my mind."

"But," he said, "I am heartily sick of all this absurd mystery. I—I am rather proud. I cannot explain it, but it affects your honour. These reports you find so amusing are gross insults. I

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was mad to make such a fool's promise."

"No," said Sophia, "you were not mad, you were in love with me, that's all. You would have promised anything!" It was most indiscreet to remind him of this mournful truth. Wrath received it with sublime (if highly coloured) indignation.

"I was never *in love* with you," he replied, angrily. "I detest the phrase. Wife to me is a sacred name. . . . But few women understand a man's best feelings, and least of all on the subject of love. They do not realise that even the vilest of us would *rather* think that the woman he loves is a bit of divinity. . . . But it is very seldom that she will let him think so—very seldom. . . . Are we quarrelling?" he said, abruptly; "once I thought we could never quarrel. This is terrible!"

"This," she said, "is marriage!"

"You speak as though you regretted—" "

"You recognise regret as though you were long acquainted with it!" A woman always handles sarcasm

with the point towards her own breast. Sophia turned pale at her own words.

"You *do* regret," she said.

"I regret anything that makes you unhappy."

"This is equivocation : you never did speak out and you never will. A man so guarded in his words must have very treacherous thoughts. Why do you look at me like that?" she said, passionately. "I repeat, you are very difficult to understand. I have been with you ever since I was born, and I have always done all the talking!" He did not attempt to deny this, but still kept his eyes on her with the patient, touching, and wistful expression of the collie dog in "The Shepherd's Chief Mourner."

"One has to take you on trust or not at all," continued his wife ; "the most exasperating man God ever made! It is a most unfortunate thing that we ever met : you are naturally secretive, and I am naturally suspicious. Why did you not let them take me to the workhouse? And why did you make love to me? You know you did : I cannot re-

member one single word you ever said, but you have got an artful way of implying everything under the sun without uttering a syllable! You never even asked me to marry you: all I know is, that I am married and I wish I wasn't." And she wept. Sophia never exhausted herself by restraining her emotions; tears now sprang to her eyes and rolled down her cheeks so softly and sweetly, that to see her one would have thought that weeping were as easy as breathing. It was a pretty study in highly cultivated sorrow.

"My dearest," said Wrath, "you are not well. But this is all my fault: I have been a beast. How can you like such a great, clumsy, ill-natured brute? It is a very flimsy excuse, but I think I worked too long this morning. Margaret was reading aloud and I did not like to——"

"What was she reading?" said Sophia.

"Some new novel: I forgot the title, but," he added, "the cover was green!"

"What was it about?"

He grabbed at the opportunity to amuse her, and detailed the plot with elaborate care—drawing however rather from his imagination than his memory. The result was an adaptation of “Red Cotton Nightcap Country,” “Wilhelm Meister,” and “Gil Blas.” He might have made some fame as a novelist.

When he had finished, Sophia coughed. “How well you remember it,” she said; “you must have listened very attentively ! ”

Then, remarking that she felt better, she left him. He heard her singing “I know that my Redeemer liveth” as she went up the stairs, and rejoiced that he had cured her headache, and could resume his fugue.

So little do men know their wives.





## CHAPTER VI.

### IN WHICH A LADY LOOKS GRATEFUL.

MORATH had been playing in ineffable contentment for some thirty minutes, when the door was opened softly and Lady Hyde-Bassett walked in. Her gait was peculiar—not goddess-like, defiant, and untrammelled in the manner of Sophia, but agreeably suggestive of moneyed leisure, a certain feminine timidity, and clinging draperies. She was already dressed for dinner, and was looking her best in violet silk and amethysts. Here it may be a fitting opportunity to mention that she was ever attired in beautiful garments : “How can I make myself a fright,” she told Eliza Bellarmine, “when I know

that my dearest is watching me from heaven? It would make him so unhappy to see me growing dowdy!" Which, Eliza thought, would have been impious had it not been American.

Margaret and Wrath had known each other for many years. She had often given him motherly advice in his attempt to bring up Sophia (who was her junior by some ten birthdays), and their friendship, which had been somewhat solemn during Sir Benjamin's lifetime, was now stepping the enchanting measures of an intellectual jig. It may be that if Lady Hyde-Bassett had not vowed perpetual widowhood, and if Miss Jenyns had not suddenly grown from a tiresome schoolgirl into a maddening but all-compelling woman——but why dwell on might-have-beens? Wrath, however, had very nearly loved her once, and as he was not a man who cast his affection on what was unlovely, where he bestowed it, there it remained. He was quite conscious that he had a kind regard for Margaret, but the difference between that kind regard and his overmas-

tering, limitless devotion to his wife was so immeasurable that it never even occurred to him to compare them. One woman occupied his life, and the other an occasional thought, and even that thought would be, as it were, a ripple on a whole ocean of Sophia.

"It is wicked to interrupt you," said her ladyship, as she entered, "but I must steal a moment just to tell you about my new genius—young Mauden."

"A new genius?" he said, lifting his eyebrows.

"I am not overrating him, I assure you. *Once* you had more confidence in my judgment!"

"Naturally," said Wrath. "That was when *I* was your new genius."

"Ah, why refer to my past follies?" said Margaret, which was certainly an adroit way of suggesting them. She was a coquette before she was a widow.

"I own," he said, "it is not pleasant to be reminded of one's mistakes."

"I never mistook *you*," she murmured: "I was only mistaken in myself."

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"I can remember," he began—"I can remember—"

"Do not remind me," said Margaret. She was wondering how she could ever have allowed herself to even vaguely contemplate the impossible possibility of marrying again. It was her only consolation to think, that for at least six months after Sir Benjamin's death she had not been in her perfect mind : chaos was come and the reign of irresponsibility. "It wanted a Shakespeare," she thought, "to make the Lady Ann accept Richard III. over her husband's coffin : it must have been then or never ! "

"Do not remind me," she said again.

"Is it only men who should have the burden of remembering ?" said Wrath, surprised at his unusual power of repartee, and deciding that it was inspired by the twilight.

"I remember too well too many errors," she sighed.

"Ah !" said he, "women only confess the sins they have left *undone* ! "

"It was a man who prayed for a talent of forgetting ! "

"He prayed in vain," said Wrath, now thoroughly exhausted and wishing to Goodness that Sophia would come in and "do the talking." Half-unconsciously he turned an ivory button in the wall, and lo! the room was illuminated by the discerning beams of the electric light.

"What a useful invention!" he exclaimed.

"Most useful!" said her ladyship, no less heartily.

"Bye the bye," he said, "Sophia has retracted her promise that I might announce our marriage. She is sublime! As she is suffering from neuralgia," he went on, "I did not tell her——"

"I will be as silent as the grave," said Margaret, divining his whole difficulty at a guess.

He could only gaze his gratitude, admiration, and wonder. "I never tease her when she is studying a new part," he explained; "she is much too sensitive to be able to do good work under the stress of annoyance. And to a woman of her nervous temperament a small fret is more distressing than a serious

calamity : her patience is too mighty for trivialities. Paper boats cannot sail in the north wind ! ” He smiled, and was evidently fully alive to what the world called the *cussedness* of the divine Sophia : only he did not call it cussedness ; it was to him the last magnificent touch to her colossal spirit.

“ But when *do* you try her patience ? ” said Lady Hyde-Bassett. “ If every woman of genius had such a husband ! I do not wonder that she worships the ground you walk on : that is a secret which she cannot keep. Oh, when a man is unselfish, no woman—not even the best—can compare with him. Splendid ! splendid ! I have only known one man like you, and that was Sir Benjamin.” The sudden remembrance of her own desolation was so afflicting that her eyes filled with tears.

“ Do not mention us in the same breath,” said Wrath ; “ you know what I think about him.”

It had been his appreciation for Sir Benjamin which had assailed her heart so perilously in what we may call the If period. “ It is such

a comfort to me," she said, "to know that at least one of my husband's friends had some conception of the man apart from his attainments. I must have loved him, if he had only been a sausage-seller!"

It was, no doubt, very touching, and perhaps an occasion when her ladyship could throw an affectionate glance at her guest with perfect propriety.

But Sophia, who happened to come into the room at that moment, and who had not heard the preceding remark, did not understand it.

"Oh," she said, lightly, "I am looking for young Mauden. Such an intelligent boy! I promised to show him the conservatory."

Without looking at Wrath—or at least, without appearing to look, for we may be quite sure that she had nicely observed every line of his countenance—she wheeled round and went out.

"How lovely she looks in that yellow *crêpe*!" said Margaret, not enviously, yet with a sigh. "It is nice to be young!"

Wrath felt that it would ill be-

come him to be unreservedly enthusiastic on the subject, seeing his close relation to the lady. But he walked to the door and watched the incomparable creature sail down the corridor.

As he went upstairs to dress for dinner, he wondered what he had done to deserve the love of such a woman, and, lest any cynical reader should assume that so excellent and kind-hearted a man was thanking Heaven for a blessing which he did not possess, let us hasten to add that Sophia was no less often astonished, on her part, that she was blessed with such a husband. For, to do her justice, she knew his strength and her own weakness : if he indulged her beyond reason, the fact was due to his magnanimity and not her superior will. He might have crushed her but did not. Hence, his charm.

But on that particular afternoon Sophia's heart was usurped by feelings very unlike gratitude : vague anger, clear discontent, and motherless desperation—the three witches of a woman's soul—were doing their best to work mischief. To be sus-

picious of Margaret was unfriendly ; to distrust Wrath was something not very far removed from base—so kind a husband, so devoted a lover, so upright a man—yet she could not forego the luxury of a grievance. Besides, in spite of all argument, common sense, and justice, she really was jealous.

Why should her husband paint Margaret Hyde-Bassett as the Madonna, and why should Margaret Hyde-Bassett roll her eyes at Wrath ?





## CHAPTER VII.

SHOWING HOW SOME VERY NECESSARY INFORMATION MAY SEEM LIKE A DIGRESSION.

**T**is an obvious truism that love in all human relations is, in the very nature of things, selfish ; those who love unselfishly only do so by living in a state of constant warfare with their meaner instincts. The natural desire is to absorb every thought and moment of the loved being ; to begrudge every interest, and dislike all things and anything which would seem to distract the You from incessant dependence on the Me. This is the undisciplined, raw desire : many conquer it—Wrath, for instance ; more, like Sophia, do not.

Yet she was not an exacting

woman—the self-repression was by no means all on his side: she suffered her husband's interest in his pictures with silent heroism ; she often remained away from his studio lest she should interrupt his work ; she concealed many of her professional worries for fear of causing him needless anxiety—for a creature so wayward and naturally heedless of others, her thoughtfulness where he was concerned was even pathetic. But it is only one more paradox from that nest of paradoxes—the human heart—that only love is strong enough to subdue love, and affection had worked its great miracle in Sophia's wilful nature. When Wrath was in question she was capable of any sacrifice, could have made herself as though she was not, would have renounced all things and followed him gladly—did he wish it—into obscurity and the suburbs. It was because she honestly believed that his social position would suffer if their marriage were made known, that she pretended to hold such eccentric and unfeminine views on the subject of a fair name. How

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the poor creature winced and ached under the looks and whisperings she daily noted and overheard, it would be impossible to say. A woman who is really living an immoral life always feels, like a condemned criminal, that the verdict is, if hard to bear, certainly just. But to Sophia, conscious of her innocence and only too proud to be the wife of the man she loved and honoured above all others, the mud pellets aimed at her reputation, stuck like knives in her heart. That she was suffering for an absurd reason has nothing to do with it: death in grotesque circumstances is none the less death, and the martyr to a fool's cause is still a martyr. As we have said before, it is the heart that makes the occasion.

It had transpired, after Wrath was elected a Royal Academician, that his family was most distinguished: his uncle the Cabinet Minister, his cousins the Wrath-Havilands of Wrath, his mother's aunt, the Marchioness of Welby, and his connections, the Granville-Coxes of Somerset, to say nothing of his

step-brother, General Gorm-Gorm, and his step-sister-in-law, Lady Gertrude Gorm-Gorm, &c., &c. To Wrath himself the whole thing was too ludicrous to be contemptible, but Sophia—poor Sophia—was undeniably impressed. The early teaching of a certain excellent governess, whose papa was a retired colonel, had done its work, and the gods of Sophia's childhood, (beginning with a Duke and ending with a Chancery Barrister), remained her gods, although she had seen their altars destroyed, and themselves profanely called humanity. She would not have it said, that Wrath had married beneath him ; she could not see the Duchesses who now flattered him, presently shooting cold glances because he had married an actress. Possibly Sophia did not reason without syllogisms, although the word itself would have caused her considerable alarm.

Her fight for success, (and she did not wake up one morning to find herself famous—she had served her dreary apprenticeship with the rest), had been waged more in the hope of making herself, at least in some

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small degree, his intellectual equal, than because she had great ideas about Art, or a longing for public applause. She loved her profession, of course, and would have been an accomplished actress had she never known Wrath—for talent does not rest on the accident of forming a certain friendship or meeting such and such a person, but he was her audience, the historic one in a vast multitude, whom every artist singles out as the critic of all others to please. If Wrath approved of her performance all was well ; but if he found fault, not all the praises of the world could have given her the encouragement she needed. Perhaps this was not as it should be from an æsthetic point of view, but Sophia's art was not the result of cultivation but instinctive : she was, in fact, most artistic when she was least scholarly. The poet Gray once wrote of a tragedy that Aristotle's best rules were observed in it, in a manner which showed the author had never heard of Aristotle. Miss Jenyns's acting had the same unpremeditated excellence. The polite world, however, was doing its best to make her

think that her readings were the result of laborious thought, that she spent hours over the nice lifting of an eyelid and devoted months to the right inflexion of a syllable, but Wrath, with his usual bluntness, having declared that "all such twaddle made him sick," she dared not assume prodigious airs in his presence. But she found it humiliating to reflect that she had so very little to do with her own ability—that she was, after all, a sort of puppet controlled by an invisible power, who made her do wonderful things when she thought she was simply acting on a chance idea.

Now young Mauden, fresh from Oxford, with much learning and no wisdom, with Plato in his brain, the *Odyssey* next his heart, and Aristophanes in his portmanteau—Mauden, who could find the whole of Aristotle in a pause, was exactly the sort of clever youth to persuade a fresh woman into a dull pedant. Already, after one conversation with De Boys on the Irony of Shakespeare contrasted with the Irony of Sophocles, a brief discussion on the respective characters of Lear

and Œdipus, with hints at Dumas, so local but so witty, and Augier, whose humour deserted him in a big situation, Sophia was beginning to feel, that Wrath as a dramatic critic lacked culture : he talked too much about work and common sense, and not enough about the True, the Universal, and Objectivity. Yet he, too, was an Oxford man, and well read : so differently do men apply their knowledge.

And here let us judge kindly of Sophia ; she had been much spoiled, she was young, beautiful, and had great talents. For even less cause many poor mortals have been led into vainglory, and have suffered much vexation of spirit. She had not yet that great gift of self-knowledge which, though a painful blessing, is still our greatest and the one to be prayed for beyond all others ; for the man who knows himself in all his great imperfections and small virtues, suffers more under praise than he ever could under censure—which, at worst, can only remind him of what his too-willing conscience has forgotten.

We have said that when Sophia

left the music-room she was, in spite of all reason and duty, jealous ; it followed therefore that her vanity was all the more sensitive. The long glance of reverential but intense admiration which fell from the fine eyes of Mr. De Boys Mauden, when she met him in the conservatory, warmed her chilled soul. She smiled divinely, blushed celestially, and murmured, for no earthly reason, "I am late ! "

De Boys, reconsidering the meeting afterwards, wondered how he found strength to resist the impulse to cry out "Jane!" and kiss her. Her likeness to Jane—Jane, whom he passionately worshipped, and whom, in all devotion, he hoped to make his adoring wife—was too bewildering.

It is just possible that Odysseus would have gone to greater lengths than the faithful Penelope, on the reasonable argument of a strong resemblance.





## CHAPTER VIII.

SHOWING HOW TRAGEDY IS NOT  
ALWAYS IN FIVE ACTS.

**M**ISS ELIZA BELLARMINÉ, all this time, was sitting in front of the looking-glass in her bedroom, wondering whether her eyes showed the effects of weeping. She wept so seldom that when she did, her face for some time afterwards would be irresistibly suggestive of the beach after a storm.

"It is hard," she said, staring at herself, "that one woman should have so much, and another, nothing. Who could blame Wrath?"

From which the intelligent reader will at once gather, that the learned and austere Miss Bellarmine had bestowed her heart on one who had never sought it: on one who

she had just learnt was the husband—and the devoted husband—of another woman. So strange is the feminine mind, that while she had quailed under the gossip which associated Wrath and Sophia in a more than charitable alliance, her position did not seem quite desperate. He would arise one day, assert his higher self, and cast about him for chaste society, coupled with moderate charms. But now—O heavy fate!—this could not be: he had married the daughter of Heth.

Eliza had not the temperament of those who consume with idleness and call it hopeless passion; her love was wholesome and honest, and worked for good, not evil. She was only too well aware that she had no smallest claim on Wrath's consideration: he had given her no encouragement—indeed, it would have been hard to find a man who had less of the drawing-room gallant in his manner with any woman. So marked was his deficiency in the elegant art of disrespectful attentions that many fashionable ladies declared they could not endure the rude monster, and were he not

supposed to be wonderfully clever, (although *they* could see nothing in his pictures), they would never even notice the wretch. Eliza, therefore, like many of us in unhappy circumstances, had only her own foolishness to blame, and that she knew this was not the least bitter of her several pangs. But already she had put Wrath out of her heart for all time.

"Never, never, never, never!"

This was her solemn incantation, and lo! even as she spoke the only romance of her dull life shivered, sobbed, and vanished. She could have cut off her hand with the same unhesitating precision had it seemed necessary. But such triumphs, whether over the will or the body, are not cheaply won : decisive moments are not realised by time, and what is done in sixty ticks of the clock the soul must remember or regret for eternity.

Eliza, having mastered a great situation in her life, was only conscious that she felt much older and very tired. She bathed her eyes, ordered herself some tea, and sat down to read Arckenholz on

Christina of Sweden—four portentous volumes which she had chosen from Sir Benjamin's library as light, yet useful reading. And although it might have been more dramatic if she had indulged instead on a long soliloquy on the hollowness of life, the injustice of God, and so on, there are those who might think it was more heroic to blow her despised nose and study a tedious historian.

Half an hour later when Eliza entered the drawing-room she discovered Wrath and Lady Hyde-Bassett playing chess, and Sophia, (who hated games of every description), engaged in a most animated conversation with De Boys Mauden. No one seemed to notice her entrance except Margaret, who gave her a swift smile and indicated with her eyes a new book on the side-table, as much as to say, "That will interest *you* more than either of these men." Eliza sighed, but drifted towards the volume. Literature was still her friend.

"How I should like to paint her as St. Martha," said Wrath, in a

low voice to Lady Hyde-Bassett ; "she has just that expression of kind, yet terrible energy St. Martha must have had ! "

"How a love affair would improve her !" said Margaret ; "every woman should have at least one love affair."

"But she is a nice creature," said Wrath. "I am very fond of her. She is a good but inaccessible angel."

"I am going to marry her to Claverhouse Digges," said her ladyship, confidently, "I shall arrange it all next autumn ! "

Artistic chess is a game beyond the petty restrictions of science.





## CHAPTER IX.

WHICH INTRODUCES A DOWAGER AND  
A PEER.

**H**E Dowager Countess of Warbeck awoke one morning at eight o'clock and discovered that she could not fall asleep again. She rang for her maid, complained that she had passed an extremely bad night (for she usually slept till nine), and arose from her bed.

"Will your ladyship have breakfast earlier than usual?" said the maid.

"No," said her ladyship, who did not feel hungry; "but tell Dawson to sound the gong for prayers at half-past eight." She therefore put her bad night to excellent account by reading her assembled household three lessons instead of one.

Would that all good Christians killed their time with so much profit—to others !

When the domestics had solemnly filed out of the big dining-room, the Dowager turned to her grandson—the one prop of her declining years—with an air of almost tragic appeal.

"I suppose," she said, "I must go to Brentmore and see this Battle—or Cattle—person ? "

"It would look more friendly, if you did," said her grandson, "but I have no wish to urge anything of the kind upon you, if you feel unequal to it."

"I never allow myself to feel unequal to a duty, Warbeck. But the position is heart-breaking."

The position which her ladyship found so distressing was briefly this : she had been the second wife of the 14th Earl, by whom she had one son, the father of the present Warbeck. The late Earl, however, had had four other sons by his previous marriage, the youngest of whom (Edmund), he had disowned for marrying a yeoman's daughter. "Not to detain the

reader with tedious particulars it will be sufficient to say that Destiny had played many sad and unlooked-for tricks with the three elder sons and their children, and now, with the not uncommon irony of human affairs, Jane Shannon, the daughter of the cast-off Edmund, was heiress to the great estate. The Dowager's grandson had the peerage, but the cream of the property—the famous "Drawne acres" of that Anne whom we mentioned in the first chapter—had fallen to Jane. No wonder the Countess could not sleep for bitterness of spirit, and no wonder Warbeck was leaving England that very morning for the Continent.

"After all these *thousands* of years, to see a Warbeck reduced to poverty!" groaned the Dowager—"I repeat, *poverty!* Heversham Place is the sort of residence for a superior cottage hospital, and Graylands is only fit to let to some American, or to a Colonial. *You* cannot possibly live there. No Earl of Warbeck has had his foot inside it since 1550. Drawne estates, indeed! Who would have heard of them if

Anne Drawne had not married a Shannon ? Who fought for them, bled for them, died for them ? No Drawnes, but the Earls of Warbeck. And now this Cattle person is to have them all—and Grosvenor Square, too ! ” This was her magnificent manner of referring to the town mansion, as though only one house in London could justly claim that address. “ Grosvenor Square, too,” she repeated ; “ and you with no roof over your head. *Fifteen thousand a year*. What is that ? *Far more than you need* ? It is not a question of *need*, it is a question of what you *require*—what is decent. And as for calling this Cattle person, Lady Jane——” Words failed her.

Her grandson smiled patiently : he knew this harangue by heart. But he never permitted himself—even in solitude—to fall below the Stoic ideal. He wore a hair-shirt under his fine linen, and took his rule of life from Sir Thomas More, but, unlike that saint, he suffered religious doubts. It was said that if he had written something touching against Christianity, or some-

thing pretty about Moll Flanders, he would have been a Superior Person. But Superior Persons do not wear hair-shirts. There are good men who yet bear on their countenance the scars of many battles lost and won ; their knowledge of good is ever shadowed by their knowledge of evil ; they are all things to all men that they may by all means save some. But Warbeck was not of these. Sir Launcelot may have died an holy man, but Sir Galahad lived holily also. It was the latter knight who had most fired the young peer's imagination. His was no self-conscious virtue, however ; at times he even affected airs of worldly cynicism which reminded his grandmother of the Miltonic Archangel who tried to explain heavenly mysteries in earthly language—and blushed red in the attempt. He was, too, a powerful fellow—no weakling, who made a virtue of debility, but a man. "What a fish for the Church !" said a bishop, who had his eye upon him.

Warbeck had all that longing of a strong nature to help some one—

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to feel that he was of some use in the world ; and he would have undergone any suffering or hardship if he had once persuaded himself that his pain would promote another's peace. But to suffer to no purpose ; to study for hours with no other desire than the accumulation of barren knowledge ; to pour weak advice into unwilling ears ; to offer dumb praise to a deaf God ; to spend his time, as a witty philosopher has said, milking a he-goat into a sieve—these were things he could not do. He knew that he was considered promising by those friends whose judgment he could not choose but value, and his University career had more than fulfilled their expectations. Yet the self-distrust was there—a haunting thought lest, in the end, he would not only disappoint those who were dear to him on earth, but that possible God who had a way of asserting His authority in the form of a still, small conscience. Youth is naturally impatient, and is not content to remain blind for even three days like St. Paul, nor can young enthusiasm believe readily

that those also serve who only stand and wait. The impulse is to rush into the fray, to kill or be killed, but both or either without loss of time or hindrance. Vanity, too, and ambition, no less than a zeal of serving the Almighty and humanity, may have something to do with the fierceness of this desire, so easy is it to flatter the soul that the glorification of self is all to the glory of God. These and similar thoughts, while they restrained Warbeck from any active participation in public affairs, were silently working for good, strengthening his judgment, and giving him some insight into his own heart and human perplexities. He would know his work in due season ; but the time was not yet come. Already he had heard the whispers of a calling, though the voice was dim and far off, not yet to be perfectly known. So he tried to be patient.

When the Countess of Warbeck's carriage drove up to "Up-at-Battle's" that same afternoon, (Brentmore is about three hours' railway journey from London),

Miss Caroline was what she called *turning out* the sitting-room. Both she and her niece had dusters pinned round their heads, and wore big aprons. Although the preceding night had brought a lawyer's letter telling Jane of her extraordinary change of fortune, she had not realised its full meaning—nor, indeed, had Miss Caroline. They were both simple-minded beings, and had been brought up to think that their daily tasks must be performed, even though the heavens were falling. It was the *day* for the parlour, and though Jane had inherited all England, the room had to be swept and garnished by some one, and as Jane was on the spot, she was, of course, the some one to do it.

Jane opened the door herself, and found the footman standing—almost gingerly, as though he were treading on very doubtful substance—on the front step.

"Is Miss Battle at home?" said he, saying Battle with difficulty, for his tongue did not take kindly to trashy syllables. (The Dowager had made up her mind that she

would first ask to see the aunt, and thus avoid the unspeakable Lady Jane Shannon. “Fiddle-de-dee on courtesy!” she had told her grandson.)

The footman assisted his aged mistress out of the carriage with respectful sympathy.

“Have I the pleasure of addressing——?” began Lady Warbeck, feeling for the first time in her life, and very much against her will, that it is not the apron which makes the servant.

“I am Jane,” said the girl; “will you come into the kitchen, for the sitting-room is full of dust?”

The Countess, in spite of her eccentricities, was a well-bred woman—one who had travelled much, observed much, and read much. She was, too, so absolutely sure of her own excellent social position that she suffered none of those fears so common to mushroom nobility, lest she might not be taken for the exalted being she was. She could, if necessary, adapt herself to any scene or any society; she did not look less a countess because she sat in a kitchen. Good breed-

ing does not require a background. She always held, however, that nervousness in her august presence showed very proper feeling, so she looked at Jane very hard for seeming so unembarrassed. Jane met her look modestly, and with the respect which instinct taught her was due to one who was so many years her senior, but with no more fear than if her great relative had been—as her ladyship wrote to Warbeck—"a tabby cat on a wall."

Miss Caroline appeared from the scullery, where she had been washing her hands, and greeted her visitor with much old-fashioned grace, but, it must be owned, little style. That is to say, she neither tittered nor stared, nor assumed an unnatural voice, but spoke and acted exactly as she always did when there was no one in sight and hearing save Battle and Jane.

"I suppose," said Lady Warbeck, when she had learnt that they were both quite well and did not find the weather trying—"I suppose you are making your preparations to come up to town. But Grosvenor

Square is a little sombre just at present."

"It must be dreadful," said Jane, with much sympathy, "so soon after a death."

"Shocking!" said her ladyship—"Shocking! It has been a matter of national regret; the Queen sent me three telegrams."

Their thoughts were disjointed and confused; these three wondering women—one young, two simple, and one neither young nor simple—had all kind hearts, although education, experience, and rank had set very different seals on each.

Miss Caroline looked at the Countess, and saw more than an elderly lady in a bonnet and mantle.

"Poor thing!" she said, and her honest eyes filled with tears.

Lady Warbeck did not know how to explain that by no possible effort of her imagination could she think of herself as a Thing. So she pretended not to hear.

"I cannot yet trust myself to speak of these painful events," she went on. "I hope I am resigned. 'Man that is born of woman—'

It is not for us to question the inscrutable decrees of Providence." Then she turned to Jane. "It would give me much pleasure if you would spend a week or so with me, and I think, in the peculiar circumstances, it would be the most proper course to pursue."

"I think so too," said Miss Caroline. "I have been worrying ever since last night—when we heard—because I knew no one who could really advise her and tell her just what to do. Girls are so thoughtless."

"So much depends on one's bringing-up," murmured her ladyship. "I daresay you are looking forward with immense delight to your future life, and your first season, and your new frocks, and so on!" (The Dowager was most serious when she seemed flippant.)

Jane had all a girl's love for beautiful clothes, and already she had certainly dreamt of a heavenly gown, soft-hued, with *straight* back seams and a train. She had also designed a black silk dolman for her Aunt Caroline. She therefore blushed a little at Lady Warbeck's

question, and owned that she had thought of ordering a new dress.

"Can you return with me tomorrow?" said Lady Warbeck, venturing a smile; "there are a great many tiresome legal matters to go through, but our man of business—he will be yours as well now," she added, with a sigh—the sigh was absolutely necessary—"is most considerate. Everything, no doubt, will adjust itself in the most satisfactory manner."

As a matter of fact, she began to see possibilities as many and great and tall as the Anakims. Warbeck, happily, was still unmarried. . . . She had decided that Jane only needed to have her hair done properly, and to be generally overhauled by a good maid. For the rest, she was even pleasing; she was uncommon, and uncommon girls were in demand; that was why those Americans married so well.

"You must keep your delightful country ideas," she said, pleasantly, remembering Lord Warbeck's love of the unaffected. "I hope London will not make you cynical. Men hate cynical girls."

"Why should London change her?" said Miss Caroline, wondering whether "cynical" was a new epidemic: something of an asthmatic nature.

"Well, I hardly know how to explain," said the Countess. "It is one of those things one takes for granted."

Miss Caroline looked anxiously at Jane. Everything in the nature of change alarmed her.

"Do you think," she said, at last, "that London will be good for Jane?"

"London is very healthy," said Lady Warbeck. "My doctor tells me that even the fogs are wholesome—if your lungs can stand them."

"It is not the fogs I fear," said Miss Caroline, "it's the folk."

"The folk?" said Lady Warbeck, "the *folk*? I understand. I know very little about them. They keep in the East End. Once or twice my dear stepson lent them Grosvenor Square for a meeting. But we were all out of town at the time."

"Aunt Caroline calls everybody,

folk," explained Jane, colouring in her effort not to laugh.

"Really?" said the Countess. "Of course there is no such thing as *everybody*—that is a newspaper vulgarism. One is either a somebody or a nobody—irrespective of rank or profession. The next best thing to a somebody, is a nobody in a good set!"

She smiled as she spoke, for there were few pleasures she enjoyed so much as expounding the truths that be—as she understood them. Had she been born in a humbler sphere she would, no doubt, have been the principal of a ladies' college. Women who possess what Mr. Joe Gargery called a "master mind," like to manage men, but they like to manage other women still better: it is a greater triumph from an artistic point of view. Lady Warbeck promised herself unalloyed joy in directing the unsophisticated being Heaven had dropped in her way.

She had to endure several pangs, however, as she drove to the hotel, (where she was spending the night), for she could not persuade herself

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that because Jane was unassuming she was necessarily meek. And meekness in a *protégé* is an essential, if one is to be a patroness with any degree of comfort or satisfaction. The Dowager was by nature a kind woman. If she was approached with what she considered proper respect, she was often found even heroic. She would put herself out to do amiable things : she arranged meetings between people who wanted or were wanted to make each other's acquaintance ; she found berths for younger sons ; she assisted mothers with their daughters ; she begged unscrupulously from the rich ; she pushed young talent (she encouraged all the arts) ; she recommended governesses, and dressmakers, and orphan homes, and hospitals, and hotels, and deserving cases—indeed, to sum up her virtues in a sentence, she never missed an opportunity of doing something to her credit. And now she had taken a fancy to Jane—which was the highest possible credit to both of them. For her ladyship had good taste and was not easily satisfied.

"The child is neither good form nor bad," she wrote to Warbeck. "She is no form at all, and would be called *original*. (I do not mean that she swears like Lady Buntynge.) She is very innocent, and has, I assume, *no* accomplishments. But really, dear, I cannot help thinking *that* is an advantage. Nowadays *every* one wants to perform and *no* one will listen, and a nice quiet girl who can *merely* appreciate would be much sought after. She must take up some *serious* interest, and I shall advise *Greek*—it is better than philanthropy, because it does not let one in for *bazaars*. I shall also urge the engagement of a governess-companion—that sweet, lady-like person whom the dear Baroness was telling me of would be *just* the creature. In appearance your cousin (for she *is* your cousin, after all) is most pleasing, her features and bearing reminded me in the most *painful* manner of your grandfather." (*The deceased peer in question had been distinguished for his moral rather than his physical charms. His wife, however, may*

*have discerned him spiritually.)* "Imagine my boundless relief to be so agreeably disappointed. She is much handsomer than Tunborough's scraggy Lady Marian. Bye the bye, I hear that Lady Marian's photographs are for *sale* in all the shop-windows, and that they sell better than those of that *Granada* person, who has such fine legs and *jumps*. Lady Dundry, Marian's godmother, is so upset about it that she has turned *Roman Catholic*. Poor dear!" (*Lady Warbeck divided the human race into dears, poor dears, and persons.*) "I will write more fully in a day or two, but remember that I am getting old and cannot be with you much longer. "Your affectionate grandmother,  
"A. WARBECK."

"That little hint about my age," she thought, "will bring him home at the end of the month."

And she slept more soundly that night than she had for many weeks.

Jane, on the morrow, when she found herself actually seated in the train and gliding out of the little

station at Brentmore, hardly knew whether to laugh or cry. She had not shed tears over her parting with her grandfather and Aunt Caroline, for she was coming back to see them again so shortly, and they had both seemed in such good spirits at her wonderful fortune. (Fortunately, Jane was not hard to deceive, for neither old Battle nor his daughter were adepts at concealing their emotions.) But now she felt lonely ; the Countess had warned her that she always slept when she was travelling, and never attempted to talk, so Jane stared out of the window, and found her only comfort in thinking that now she was rich she could send De Boys anonymous bank-notes and so enjoy the rare distinction of helping a genius. For she no longer thought of him as her lover : a very dear friend, that was all, a sort of relation, almost a brother—but more interesting. If he ever married and had children she would be their godmother and *try* to like his wife. She might also build him a church, and in the meantime she would do all she could for poor Mr. O'Neill.

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gan, the curate, who had been his tutor.

When she thought of herself she was at once both eager and fearful to learn what the Future would be : as if there is not always still another Future—when one Future has become a Past—to fear and yet rush into ! Her personal experience of the world was slight to the point of nothingness, but from a long course of incessant and unsystematic reading she had gathered such a variety of (more or less uncertain) knowledge, from metaphysic to the Greek drama, that she was, as she told her aunt, prepared for anything. In imagination, she had walked in courts and market-places, in ancestral halls and suburban villas ; poets, scholars, and wits were her constant companions, not to mention kings and archbishops ; for one accustomed to such company, the Dowager Countess of Warbeck, and even a row of flunkies, had no terror. When she saw the big drawing-rooms at Queen's Gate (the Dowager's town residence) she thought that the kitchen at Up-at-Battle's was more cheerful. Even

the piano, which had ebony legs and was elegantly draped in an Indian shawl, seemed to cry out for a sympathetic touch. Jane in her grey alpaca felt very sorry for it. Lady Warbeck had been fully prepared to see her trip over the rugs, slide off the brocaded chairs, and dazzled by the unaccustomed splendour of her surroundings. It was disappointing in some respects that she did not, yet, on the whole, satisfactory.

"To-morrow," said her ladyship, "I suppose you would like to see Grosvenor Square?"

"Any day you think best, grandmama!" said Jane.

The Dowager had told her that she preferred this mode of address. But, as her maid told the housekeeper, "Her lad'ship was not born yesterday—*she* knew what *she* was about, bless you!"

"Trust her," said the housekeeper, "she's got the brains of the whole fam'ly; she'll marry Lady Jane to his lordship—mark my words!"

Thus profanely do hirelings discern the hidden motives of the mighty.



## CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH A YOUNG GENTLEMAN DEFINES DUTY AND OTHER UNCERTAINTIES.



IVEN two young people, idleness, and a week, and the sum total is Folly ; add the artistic temperament and a pretty gift for philosophic discussion, and you get Sympathy ; multiply by a sound knowledge of the Classic amorists, and the result is Romance.

De Boys had been at The Cloisters one week when he received tidings of Jane's altered position. He felt at once that whatever hopes he had formed with regard to their marriage, would now be idle, nay, more — presumptuous. Such instant surrender, it may be, showed modesty and good taste, but for a lover he was, perhaps, resigned too

soon. Resignation is an heroic virtue, but it best displays its spirit after a sharp tussle with despair. In this instance, however, it seemed as though the two giants had merely yawned at each other. Mauden had not the smallest doubt of his great love for Jane, notwithstanding he wrote so seldom and a cold tone had crept into her replies—all that sort of thing could be put right in a single interview, when the time came for a serious understanding,—or, at least, it might have been put right, if she had not inherited this beastly money—and the beastlier title. He had already made up his mind not to enter the Church, and had his eyes fixed on a professorial chair. Professor Mauden and Lady Jane Mauden did not, in his opinion, sound well. By a confusion of ideas, too, Jane Shannon seemed the shadow and Sophia Jenyns the reality, and while he composed his pretty speeches to Jane, he rehearsed them (with appropriate expression) to Sophia. It must be remembered, he was quite unaware that the actress was Wrath's wife.

Wrath had begun his Madonna,

and when he was not painting, he would sit in rapturous thought. The Madonna, too, not to speak irreverently, had Margaret's nose—and Sophia's nose had a far finer shape than Lady Hyde-Bassett's. Sophia shed bitter tears over the agonising pettiness of the whole trouble ; but, in the first place, she was feeling ill, and secondly, as she told herself, straws show which way the wind blows. That her husband made his picture like Margaret, against his will — indeed, unconsciously—was a significant and appalling fact : his very St. Joseph had a look of her. Yet Wrath fondly imagined that his work was purely ideal, flatly opposed to realism, all composed from the unearthly material of his religious instinct. These reflections and a constant headache were as frank in their villainy as the stage-direction—"Enter, attendant, with two murderers." No creatures for compromise, these !

Sophia was strolling in the garden with De Boys one afternoon, and found herself thinking that love was a mistake—it made one too unhappy ; friendship, on the other

hand, was soothing and agreeable.

"Social conventions," De Boys was saying, "are the greatest nuisance. I would banish them with a fiery sword. There were none such in the Garden of Eden!"

"Ah, but in the Garden of Eden there was only one woman!" sighed Sophia.

"Why," he said, in an injured voice, "do you always pretend to be so cynical? I do not see why we cannot go back to—to the sort of existence—I mean the idyllic and perfect state of Adam and Eve before the Fall. Merely viewed as a philosophical experiment it might at least be attempted. If it proved successful, it would encourage others——"

"But if it failed——" said Sophia.

He cleared his throat. "You must let me translate for you some tremendous passages from the 'Phaedrus,'" he replied. "Plato deals with the whole question as only a poet can—for he was a poet. And I think you will say with me that it is a poet's subject; its philo-

sophy is not of this world, but is, as it were, a figure of the True, and musical, as is Apollo's lute. I cannot agree with Browning when he speaks of—

“ ‘ The heroic for earth too hard,  
The passion that left the world to lose itself  
in the sky.’ ”

Why give so much consolation to those who have failed to realise their ideals—who have merely aspired, and utter no word of praise to those who have actually attained to Higher Things? All the teaching of the present day seems to assume that no man or woman ever yet accomplished a purpose, or thoroughly believed in anything or anybody ! ” It is so delightful to be young, and long-winded, and able to believe, at least, in oneself ! “ A hero, nowadays,” he went on, “ need not fight: he has only to say he would like to fight if he could ! ”

“ You have so much moral courage,” said Sophia, “ and I have none ! ”

“ If I may say so, I think you are the most courageous woman I have ever met. You have not only the power to Will—but to Do.”

"I fear you are mistaken. I have too much Do and too little Will—if you understand me."

"A little impulsive, perhaps."

"I can only resist one impulse by yielding to another," said Sophia. "I know my own character too well. I need a restraining force."

De Boys drew himself up, and would have made a fine allegorical study for any of the heroic virtues.

"You," he said, "may need a restraining force in the same way that a highly poetical imagination requires discipline: noble desires and fine thoughts must not be wasted on that 'chartered libertine,' the air." The breeze stirred a maddening curl which fluttered on the nape of Sophia's neck, and the young man sighed. So far, air had the advantage of philosophy.

"A woman like you," he said, "so extraordinarily gifted—I speak quite impersonally—might do so much by refusing to accept the low standard of existing morality. We want some beautiful and witty saint: what Wrath might call 'a saint in drawing.' It is such a cruel wrong to give people the idea that only sin-

ners are amusing or good-looking. There is sublime beauty, no doubt, in the mere expression of a pure-minded being : but when a fine spirit is set in fair material, and she can flavour her chaste conversation with Attic salt, her influence must undoubtedly cover a larger field than if she looked dowdy and talked banalities. And, I take it, a woman who did not accept life in its vanity, would find no possible pleasure in the adornment of her own person : she would simply regard it as a duty which she owed to society — one which, I think, would come under the head of honouring the king ! ”

Sophia felt her enthusiasm rising towards sainthood : De Boys had a perfectly charming view of moral obligations.

“ You think,” she quavered, “ it is a duty to try—and look—decent ! ” Two hours and a half spent over her toilette that morning needed some slight justification.

De Boys’s eyes wandered over her face and figure.

“ Unquestionably,” he said, with what resembled, but was not, calmness ; “ unquestionably, a duty.”

"How," said Sophia, "should one begin if one wished to rebel against existing low standards of morality?"

"By the silent but convincing force of example," he replied—"by your actions."

"What kind of actions?" she asked. "You know—I have—" she blushed—"a soup kitchen."

Delicious simpleton! and with it all, a genius!

"Soup kitchens," he said gravely, "are excellent; but, morally speaking, they do not convey anything but soup."

Their eyes met, and the result was a duet in laughter.

"You shall not make fun of me," she said at last.

"Make fun of you! As if I could make fun of you!"

"I often laugh at myself," she said. "I am always ridiculous; even when I am unhappy I am perfectly absurd. All my tragedy is in my acting; my real life is a burlesque."

"But when are you unhappy?" he said, in a voice of unfeigned concern, and with a fierce glance at the imaginary offender. "When are you unhappy?"

"Often," said Sophia; "in fact, always. I am so tired of being treated like a buffoon! Even Wrath himself—even Wrath, my first and dearest friend—" she paused.

"Of course," said De Boys, swallowing envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness at one gulp, "he must be your dearest friend."

"All my life," she faltered—"all my life—my friend; but even he tells me that I act well only because I must. And is not that in itself sufficient to prove that he regards me as an irresponsible being—a marionette with a faculty of speech? I know my words are often very silly, but my thoughts are terribly serious. Oh, if he knew how serious!"

De Boys himself was surprised at her change of manner—although it had never occurred to him that she was absolutely flippant. He had explained away her whimsicalities and nonsense as the vagaries of genius. What would have looked like affection in a woman of commonplace attainments, seemed, at least, pardonable in one who had so many atoning qualities; she was not, how-

ever, attractive because of her foolishness, but in spite of it. Young and inexperienced as Mauden was, he felt all this no less than the middle-aged Wrath, who had loved Sophia too long, and loved her too deeply, not to love also with wisdom. The difference between these two men—the one who loved her and the one who thought he loved her—was shown in the fact that, while Wrath helped her, as delicately as he could, to overcome her faults, Mauden encouraged them. Yet such is the contrariety between effects and intentions, that neither Wrath nor Mauden, nor, be it said, any human creature, could give Sophia the one thing needful—peace of heart. She chafed alike under praise or blame : no one understood her, no one knew what she really meant or really wanted ; even her nearest, best, and dearest misconstrued her ten times a day.

“ If he only knew,” she repeated, “ how serious I am ! ”

“ You must remember,” said Mauden, “ there are a great many years between you ; Wrath probably regards you still as a small

child. It was and is exactly the same in my own home : my uncle—the kindest and most generous man in the world—never can understand that my days for leading-strings are past."

Sophia caught her breath : De Boys had plucked up the very root of the matter. She was no companion for Wrath : he thought her too young—perhaps she wearied him, just as children occasionally tire even the fondest of their relatives. It was only natural that he should find Margaret Hyde-Bassett's society so pleasant : they were nearer in years, they had both lost their sensitiveness to mere impressions, and were now rather re-colouring their old experiences than gaining fresh ones.

"I never thought of that before," she said, "but now you speak of it, I see the reasonableness of the idea. It explains everything."

"But," said De Boys, "we are both young : we can never seem children to each other. We both know that we are responsible beings, that we are masters of our fate : that we are under the law of liberty."

"Masters of our fate," repeated Sophia; "do you believe that?"

"How can I disbelieve it," he said, "when I live and have the evidence of each day to convince me."

Sophia turned her face towards him. "Tell me," she said, "what I must do. I am tired of thinking. The world seems so unreal sometimes, and words and people and things lose all meaning. But I could be obedient, I could do what I was told, and I think—I could be happy that way. I want to escape from my own commands: I—I am too merciless a tyrant."

"Sophia!" said Mauden. He had never called her Sophia before: it was a great step for him, but she was too preoccupied to notice it. "Sophia," he said, again, "can we not both be obedient to our best instincts? can we not follow them—together?"

"What are they?" said Sophia; "and can we trust them?"

Before he could reply the sound of Wrath's deep, rare laughter came through the windows which opened on the lawn. Was it thus that Madonnas were painted?

“Finish,” said Sophia, turning pale—“finish what you were going to say—when he laughed.”

“I think I could write it better,” said De Boys.

“Do you, too, write?” she said. “A—a friend of mine had—a friend who never told her anything, but he wrote beautiful letters—oh, such letters! and then he would walk up and down the room while she read them.” Her head drooped and her voice trembled; these reminiscences were heart-breaking. “But,” she said, looking up, “you are not at all like the man who did that: you are quite—quite different. I should have thought *you* could have spoken out.”

“I can,” cried De Boys, on his mettle—“I can! I will, now that you have told me—I may.”

“Of course you *may*,” said Sophia, “because my knowledge of you assures me that you will not say anything—silly. I mean something which ought not to be said—or written.”

“Friendship,” said De Boys—“perfect friendship casteth out fear. Between friends there ought to be no dread of giving offence.”

"N—no!" said Sophia; "but at the same time we must not think that our friends are the only people we can treat rudely, and with unkindness."

"Unkindness!" said De Boys. "How can you so misunderstand me!"

"I was not thinking of you," she said. "At that moment I had other friends in my mind—women friends."

This was only a half-truth, and it flashed across her mind that it was not easy to be saintly even in the course of a most innocent conversation: one could lie in all circumstances and for the most trivial reason—indeed, for no reason in the world.

"The ideal union," began De Boys—"the union we have already discussed——"

"The Before-the-Fall ideal," she said quickly. "I know."

"Why could not we—would you be willing—I should say—would you mind very much—being called my wife?"

"My dear De Boys!" she murmured, with maternal pity and

affection—"My dear De Boys"—and she looked at him, smiling helplessly—"My dear De Boys!"

Anything more chilling to lover-like aspirations is not to be imagined. Long years afterwards the echo of that motherly "My dear De Boys!" could bring an east wind on the warmest day.

"It is my turn," he said, hotly, "to be treated like a buffoon when I am serious!"

"Don't say that," said Sophia; "but—but the idea startled me!"

"Is that all?" he said, eagerly; "because, in that case, you might become accustomed to it."

"First," she murmured, at last, "let us clearly understand what the idea is."

"We should remain, just as we are—friends," said the young man, "only truer friends than the world understands by the term; but, as a concession to propriety, we would go through the ceremony of marriage. It—it is rather difficult to explain in detail: the ideal never does lend itself to definition!"

"There would be no love-making—nothing silly," said Sophia, "no-

thing commonplace, and ridiculous, and domestic ! ”

“ Certainly not.”

“ Then,” said the lady, “ suppose we tried it for a little before we actually bound ourselves by any religious and legal form ? ”

He saw immediately the countless advantages of this suggestion, and, as they unrolled themselves he grew pale at the *disadvantages* of his first plan. It is the memory of peril and not peril itself which is so appalling. De Boys looked back at the last ten minutes as he might have glanced at a thunderbolt which had missed him by an inch.

“ We must, of course, do nothing rash,” he said, “ because rashness would mar the harmony of the action. To do things decently and in order is the very rhythm of existence.”

“ I will think it well over,” said Sophia, “ and let you know my decision on Monday ; but until then do not refer again to the subject. If we talk, it must be as though this conversation had never taken place.”

“ But on Monday,” said De Boys, “ I must leave.”

"Then," said Sophia, calmly, "I will tell you in good time, so that you may make the necessary preparations—whether I have decided to accompany you."

"But," he stammered, "might not that look odd? Your guardian \_\_\_\_\_"

"I am not Wrath's ward," she said; "I am my own mistress. Leave everything to me."

A long silence followed: they sauntered, one of them quite blindly, towards the house.

"I fancy," he said, "I heard the dressing-gong."

Sophia thought, that although he was a better conversationalist than Wrath he did not wear so well: two hours seemed to exhaust the fund of his ideas. Now Wrath could maintain an interesting silence from year's end to year's end.

"Oh! the difference of man and man!"

Gentler ladies than Goneril have had occasion to utter the same lamentation.



## CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH ANOTHER YOUNG GENTLEMAN DEFINES DUTY.

**J**HE Dowager Countess of Warbeck found Jane more interesting each day ; she was so quiet in manner, so sweet - tempered, so thoughtful, so sensible—in fact, the Dowager's letters to her dear friends the Marchioness of Dayme and the Lady Dundry, were always overweight during that period. Her notes to her grandson, however, were brief, telling much of her own ill-health and very little of Jane. The Countess never made the fatal mistake of supposing that the rest of mankind were fools, and she alone had wisdom ; she gave every creature credit for a certain

amount of perception and a great deal of cunning. For this reason her machinations usually proved successful. She was extremely careful not to drop a word which might excite Warbeck's suspicion of her darling scheme ; she even wrote him a glowing account of a new *débutante* who, she declared, had exactly the kind of beauty he admired. Her heart swelled with a diplomatist's pride when she received a telegram from the young peer announcing his sudden return to England. "Let him once see Jane," she thought, "and the rest is inevitable."

In the meantime, his portrait, (painted by Wrath, the Academician), was placed in a better light, and Jane was occasionally reminded that although the work in question was an excellent likeness, it did not do the original full justice. "No artist," said the Dowager, "could ever catch his smile ! "

"He is certainly very handsome," said Jane. "Grandfather's nephew," she added, after a little pause, "is also handsome. The one, you know, who is so clever and who is

now at Oxford. Would you like to see his photograph?"

"I would," said her ladyship, drily. To her horror, Jane unfastened her gown at the throat and displayed a small locket and chain. She opened the locket and handed it, with a blush, to her grandmama.

"Not a bad-looking person—for his kind," said the Dowager, "not at all bad-looking. He has a look of Spence" (Spence was the head footman). "I am sure he is most worthy. But I would not wear him in a locket! It might give stupid people the idea that you were in love with him—and there are so many stupid people! Besides, if it came to his ears he might think the same thing. Young men are so conceited."

"Oh!" said Jane, "I should not like him to think that. I—I do not see how he could. He—he isn't conceited, and—and he is not a bit like Spence!"

"My dear," said her ladyship, "what would you say yourself, if you saw a young girl wearing a man's photograph on her neck! It is not maidenly—in fact, with no

desire to hurt your feelings, it is immodest. I appreciate your childish and innocent sentiment in the matter—affection and gratitude are always charming, even when sadly misplaced; but you are no longer a little girl running wild in the fields. The only person you could wear in that fashion would be your husband, or, in conceivable circumstances, your future husband. But as you have neither one nor the other at present, it is more seemly that your neck should be unfettered. Enjoy your liberty while you may." She smiled her sweetest—and the Dowager could smile like an angel when she chose—but Jane sighed. The chain, however, and the photograph were slipped into her pocket; she could not be immodest, and, no doubt, her grandmama had spoken sound sense.

"Play me that exquisite *Presto*," said the Countess. "I doat on Beethoven when he escapes from that terrible diddledy-diddledy-diddledy in the bass. The Brentmore person really taught you extremely well. Take it at a good pace."

One has not much time to muse on the absent if one is playing a *Presto*, and an active lady marks the time with her cane.

Warbeck was expected to luncheon that same day, and the Countess had given orders that he was to be shown into the library, as she wished a few moments' private conversation with him. Jane, therefore, was half-way through the *Presto* when his lordship's arrival was announced.

"Don't stop playing, my dear," said the Dowager. "I so like to hear music in the distance."

Then she went down to her grandson.

The young man came forward as she entered the room, and seemed surprised, delighted, and relieved to see her walking.

"You must be much better," he said; "I have been so anxious about you. I hardly dared hope that you were even on the sofa!"

"I am almost myself, dear," said his grandmother. "I began to improve from the instant I received your telegram. Sir Claretie says he considers my recovery a miracle. But you are not looking well."

He was thinner and paler than he had been a fortnight since, and had, in some way, a new expression, an even greater seriousness of manner.

"You have something on your mind," said her ladyship, suddenly ; "you are going to tell me that you are engaged ! "

Warbeck smiled, but shook his head. "*Cherchez la femme* is such stale doctrine," he said.

"There is no newer doctrine for the old Adam !" said the Dowager ; "but if there is no woman in your news, then it has something to do with religion. Do not say that you have been reading Hooker, and Laud, and the rest of them, and have become High Church ! "

"I read Hooker and Laud long ago," he said, "but I am not a High Churchman."

"Then," she said, "you are a Higher Pantheist. Oh dear ! "

"To save you further suspense," he said, "I am still—nothing. But I have joined a Celibate Brotherhood."

The Countess did not look shocked, but her aspect was certainly grave.

"It means, of course, the end of everything—from an ambitious point of view," she said, slowly.

"I think," said Warbeck, "it means the beginning of everything—from the only point of view worth considering."

"Quite so," said her ladyship—"quite so. But there is neither wisdom nor virtue in renouncing marriage unless you fully realise what marriage is and what it has to offer. In my opinion it is far more difficult to be a married saint than a saint in the cloisters; Bishop Taylor has pointed this out with much eloquence. Do you think you will never wish to marry?"

Warbeck laughed with the buoyancy of a mortal who has never loved. Before he could reply, the Countess checked him.

"I see," she said, "you know nothing about it. I should feel better satisfied if I knew that you had had some romantic experience. Because if it does not come early—it will come late. And then what trouble! I have seen such unhappiness come of people assuming that because they never

have cared for any one, they never will."

"You see," said Warbeck, serenely, "if a man knows that he is under a vow of celibacy the question of sex becomes a dead letter. A woman is merely an individual! The effect of a vow is almost miraculous."

The Countess groaned. "The great thing," she said, "is to be saved from oneself, and oneself so easily passes for a great conviction! See how many young people gabble off the marriage vows: and *their* effect is by no means miraculous."

"Well," said Warbeck, naïvely, "when you consider what a large proportion of humanity take them, you must admit that, on the whole, they observe them very faithfully. Society is so small and the world is so large, one must look at the marriages of the world."

"This brotherhood," she said, "this society, or whatever it is, you have joined, is not, I understand, religious?"

If it was not religious, she thought, one could wriggle out of its ridiculous regulations, and even

if it was, one could, in an emergency, change one's religion ! She was a lady who only considered impediments for the purpose of destroying them.

"Oh, no," said Warbeck, "its work is purely secular. Dawes, of Balliol, founded it — you know Dawes, of course ? "

"Dawes ? " said the Countess. "Do you mean the person who lives at Shoreditch and writes to the *Times* about the Athenian Democracy ? "

Warbeck nodded his head. "He is a tremendous swell," he said ; "he is the sort of genius who lives in seclusion and animates a great public movement. There must always be a grand character of that kind, who can despise fame and use ambitious men as tools."

"Dear me !" said the Dowager ; "so you, I presume, are in this Mr. Dawes's tool-basket ? "

This was not the way to express an unselfish young man's devotion to a noble cause ; he felt this, and was deeply hurt.

"If you like to put it that way," he said, flushing a little, "yes—I

am in Dawes's tool-basket. I hope, however, it is not because I am vulgarly ambitious. I only wish to perform my highest duties in the best way. My only object in taking the vow was this — to serve the public well one should have no private interests. In any great governmental crisis one is too often reminded of the man in the parable who had married a wife. It is time some one realised, that self-sacrifice is the only sure foundation for permanent success."

"H'm," said the Dowager ; "very high-minded and most interesting. But the British Constitution does not present any opportunities for martyrdom ; at present, no politician can be offered a worse humiliation than a peerage ! But that is bad enough, I admit. I have once or twice thought very seriously of dropping my title ; it has lost all meaning, and now it is so much more distinguished to be a commoner ! But come, I want to introduce you to Jane. She will be charmed with your views ; she, too, is full of heroic nonsense."

Jane was still playing when the Dowager and Warbeck came upon her.

"This," said the Dowager, "is your cousin Warbeck."





## CHAPTER XII.

### IN WHICH A LADY SPEAKS HER MIND.

**W**HEN Warbeck dropped his cousin's hand, he gave a half-sigh. He never shook hands with either men or women when he could possibly avoid it: he regarded the act as a sign of friendship or affection—not one to be heedlessly given. This idiosyncrasy had made him many enemies, but enemies so created are not to be greatly feared.

Jane's hand was one of her charms; it was white, delicate in shape, and, what was more, firm, and, what was more than all, very womanly. It seemed made to bestow blessings. Warbeck was extremely sensitive to moral atmosphere: some people made him choke,

others gave him new life. He was, therefore, quick to appreciate the young girl's grace and purity, and to appreciate her was to remember his vow. So he half-sighed.

Jane was already what she had promised to be when De Boys left Brentmore—a girl of singular beauty. She had all the brilliance without the self-consciousness of Sophia Jenyns, and for that reason she was, perhaps, less striking at first sight. Sophia never permitted herself to escape attention. Jane did not care whether she was noticed or ignored ; she knew that she was far from plain, (for the pretty girl who is ignorant of her own comeliness does not exist), but since she had resolved not to think of De Boys as a lover, she had lost all interest in her appearance. At one time, certainly, she had longed to find favour in his sight and so, no doubt, had sent many foolish wishes after the perishable and fleeting attractions of feature and complexion. But this was a weakness of the past—she would never be so vain again—ah, never ! At the same time, when she saw her new cousin, she was

rather glad that she happened to be wearing her most picturesque gown.

But in spite of the agreeable impression each had produced on the other, the Dowager found them both very dull during luncheon. Warbeck talked on prosaic subjects and rarely addressed himself to Jane. The Countess observed, too, with consternation, that he never once looked at his cousin, but kept his eyes fixed on his plate. She had never seen him so stupid. As for Jane, her shyness was most natural and becoming ; she was a girl who could hold her peace without sinking into inanity. It was Warbeck who caused her ladyship uneasiness. Like most determined women she could only be discouraged by time —by the wearing off of enthusiasm, mere facts could not shake her purpose, nor opposition, her courage. The shortest-lived of her projects at least died a natural death, and was immediately succeeded by a direct descendant. Having made up her mind that Warbeck's marriage with his cousin Jane should take place in the autumn, her ladyship regarded

his celibate vow as a mere piece of foolery ; it had absolutely no bearing on the matter in point. But why was he so depressing in his manner ? Had he no eyes ? no ears ? no taste ? no manliness ? With all his heroics had he so little of the hero that he remained like a stock or a stone in the presence of girlhood and beauty ? If this was the influence of Dawes of Balliol, the sooner that person was given a colonial appointment the better. He was not wanted in London.

When luncheon was at an end, Jane was obliged to leave them, as she had an engagement to drive in the Park with another new relation —a lady who need not detain us, since she was only remarkable for her visiting list. Warbeck coloured a little when he wished Jane good-bye. “ I am afraid, too,” he added, “ we shall not meet again for some time. As my grandmother is so much better, I shall return to France to-morrow.” He held the door open for her, and again half-sighed, as, having wished him a pleasant journey, she passed out.

“ Warbeck ! ” said the Dowager,

"surely you do not mean that? You are not going away again?"

"I have a great deal of work on hand," he said, with some awkwardness. "I am preparing one or two speeches and a short pamphlet, and I find I get fewer interruptions in Veronne. It is such a dull little village. There is only one man there I can talk to—Père Villard, the historian. And he is also there for quiet, so we only meet to argue!"

"But," said her ladyship—"but what do you think of Jane?" She could scarcely conceal her impatience.

"Your letters," said Warbeck, after some hesitation, "had given me no idea—but I have exchanged so few words with her. I certainly did not expect to see so—so—tall a girl!"

Lady Warbeck had frequently observed that a man's language became ambiguous as his sentiments grew unmistakable. She gathered fresh hope.

"I wonder you think her plain!" This was a stroke of genius. It surprised him into candour.

"On the contrary, I think her lovely."

"H'm ! But she is not silly with it—she is most intellectual."

"I am sure of it."

The Dowager looked at the ceiling. At some moments one can claim sympathy even from the inanimate.

"She will no doubt marry very well."

The young man frowned. "She is so young yet," he said. "Do not let her make any rash engagement, if you can possibly keep her free. It is so easy to bind oneself, and—and so impossible to escape the consequences. I mean, a promise may be made in all sincerity and after the most serious consideration, yet without fully realising——" He paused. "I am only saying this," he said, at last, "because a girl takes so much risk—even in the most favourable circumstances—when she marries. Her very innocence is, in a measure, against her."

"It seems to me," said the Countess, drily, "that innocence is against a great many people."

"Not a *great many*, my dear grandmother," he replied, with equal dryness. He got up from his chair and walked to the window. Jane

at that very moment came out of the house and stepped into the carriage. He watched her drive away.

"Yes," he said. "I can work much better at Veronne."

The Countess began to wonder whether a celibate vow might not be a more calamitous invention than she had at first suspected.

"Warbeck," she said, "you will surely think better of — of this arrangement you have made with Dawes ? "

"Think better of it !" he repeated. "The time for thinking about it is past. It is now an accomplished fact. My word has been given."

"But I am certain you will regret——"

"It is not a step I would ever allow myself to regret, nor would I place myself in a situation where I might be even tempted to regret it. I made it with the full knowledge that it might possibly involve some slight self-sacrifice. Dawes has been through the mill : he was most careful not to conceal any probable difficulty." He spoke firmly and fixed his eyes on hers with an

expression which she recognised as the faintly stubbornness.

"Ah," said the Countess, quickly, "you think it would be safer to avoid your cousin Jane. That is why you are going back to Veronne!"

"What an absurd idea," said her grandson. "You must think me very susceptible."

"The Shannons are all alike," said her ladyship; "they are icebergs to all women till they meet the right one. And then they melt at a glance. Look at Jane's father—poor Edmund. He saw this Battle's daughter hanging clothes on a line, and fell in love with her on the spot. *Nothing* would make him reconsider it; his obstinacy was simply criminal. But in your case matters are very different. Jane is desirable from every point of view; there is no reason——"

"There is every reason," said the young man, "why we must change the subject. You must forgive me, but I cannot discuss it further."

"I will speak my mind," said the Dowager. "You are ruining your whole life for a whim—a fad—a piece of arrant coxcombery. It is

not even religious—you have admitted as much. What can I call it, then, but affectation? In a year's time—less—you will be ashamed to remember it. But in the meanwhile——”

“In the meanwhile,” said Warbeck, “I can at least be honourable. And now I think we have talked enough, my dear grandmother. You will be very tired.”

“Tired? I am perfectly ill. You have given me my death-blow!” She sank back in her chair, and was evidently far from well. Warbeck knelt down by her side and took her hand.

“You would not have me behave dishonourably,” he said; “you don't seem to understand. It—it is not always so easy to do one's duty; is it fair to make it harder? But it must be done in any case.”

“Duty!” she said, peevishly. “It will soon be heroic to wear no collar! Foppery! twaddle! That a man in your position, with your responsibilities, with an unblemished title to support, should stoop to such indecent, mawkish, hysterical *balderdash!* It is scandalous!” She

sank back again, but summoned her remaining strength for one last blow. "I have lived too long!"

"You are very cruel."

"I have lived too long!" she repeated.

"In a calmer moment, you will see how you have wronged me!"

"Too—long."

"Shall I ring for your maid?"

He was really alarmed—she had changed so much in the last ten minutes.

"Twenty maids could not help me! Warbeck—you have not meant—what you have been—saying?" Her voice was weak; she looked a very old and very feeble woman. And he loved her dearly. "Tell me—you did not—mean it," she repeated.

"I meant it," he said. "I must always mean it."

"But in the circumstances," she gasped, "this Dawes—he would absolve you from—your—promise."

"Dawes!" said Warbeck. "I do not make vows to Dawes—nor swear by Dawes. As I have said, you do not understand how extremely serious a vow of this kind is."

"You distinctly said it had nothing to do with religion," she murmured. "How can it be serious when it has nothing to do with religion?" Her failing eyes were only weak in sight : they could still pierce like needles.

"I can respect religious scruples," she went on, "but I have no patience with any Daweses of Balliols ! It is noble, it is saintly to kill your aged grandmother for a Dawes. You do not believe in a God, but you will ruin your family for a Dawes who lives at Shoreditch ! I am tired of life!" Once more she bowed her white head. "The country is going to the dogs—and Daweses!"

"My dear grandmother, will you listen to reason ?"

"Reason?" she groaned. "Every bone in my body fairly aches with reason. Ring for Coleman, that I may get to bed !"

He had his hand on the bell when Jane entered : she had returned with some message for the Dowager. When she saw her ladyship's pallid face and Warbeck's distress she looked from one to

the other and grew pale herself.

"Grandmama," she faltered, "are you feeling ill?"

"He has killed me," said the Countess, pointing to her grandson, "he has given me my death-blow. I shall never recover." She rose with some difficulty from her chair, and drew herself up to her full height.

"Lean on me," said Jane, with a nice disregard of Warbeck.

"No," said the Dowager; "henceforth I lean on no one. My staff has failed me when I needed it most. When I can no longer support myself, I must fall. Where I fall, there let me lie. Remain where you are, my dear, I will not be followed. Solitude now is my only refuge!" and this marvellous invalid walked out of the room with grave and majestic steps, leaving Jane and her cousin Warbeck face to face, and alone.





## CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH ANOTHER LADY SPEAKS  
HER MIND.

JANE was now able to observe the young man more critically than had yet been possible, and the more she observed him, the greater effort it required to maintain her just indignation at his conduct. For, of course, he must have behaved most brutally. Had not his too fond grandmother implied as much? And if *she* had said so, what could a less partial witness think?

"I suppose," said the girl, in a severe voice, "you will at least remain in London until she is well enough to see you again? You cannot part like this."

"It is a most painful misunderstanding," said Warbeck.

"It is not for me to dictate," said Jane, in a tone of command, "but if it is a misunderstanding you will surely lose no time in making it clear. She is too old for these violent scenes. And she has had a great deal of sorrow and anxiety lately : perhaps she is not so patient as those who are young, and have nothing to worry them but their own want of thought!"

This authoritative and elderly tone in one so young and gentle astonished the Earl, no doubt, but he was so far from feeling any resentment, that he experienced some difficulty in hiding his admiration.

"I have been trying to make it all clear," he said, quietly, "ever since I arrived this noon. The only trouble is, that she refuses to listen. I have tried to be patient, and I hope I have not spoken harshly. But I must do my duty whether she understands it or not. The quarrel has arisen—I fear we must call it a quarrel—about a question of duty—of honour."

Jane's cheeks began to burn : she feared he might think she was inquisitive. And inquisitiveness was not one of her faults.

"Please," she stammered, "please do not—"

But he, too, was sensitive, and had very delicate feelings.

"I quite understand you," he said ; "I am only afraid you will not understand *me*. My dear grandmother has a genius for misrepresentation : she can describe what she sees with perfect truthfulness, but she does not see things as they are. In this particular instance it is most unfortunate. For honour has only one aspect : it is not a matter of opinion, but an incontrovertible fact."

"But she is so honourable herself," said Jane, eagerly ; "if you are in the right she must agree with you—she must. Are you quite—quite sure that you are right ? It is almost as easy to do wrong for a good motive, as to do right for a bad one. There are always so many reasons why we should follow our own wishes."

"On the whole," said the young

man, slowly, "I may say there is no danger of any such confusion arising in this case: it is not a matter where my duty is—is perfectly my inclination. If it were not a question of principle—of moral obligation, I—I might surrender."

"May I tell her that you will reconsider it?" said Jane. "There could be no harm in saying that, because the more you consider what is right, the *righter* it seems."

"I cannot re-consider it," he answered, looking away—"I cannot, indeed; I only want to forget it all as soon as possible."

"Don't be angry with me," said Jane, "but for you—that sounds rather—rather cowardly. Oh, I ought not to have said that. I do not know the circumstances. I am always saying something thoughtless. Indeed, I did not mean it."

"You are quite right," he said, "and I am cowardly. But it is one advantage that I know my own weakness: I do not attempt feats beyond my strength." Yet he did not look weak, this man with a square chin and a firm mouth: anything rather than weak. Jane was bewildered.

"My grandmother knows my address," he went on ; "but I will find means to hear how she is, even if she does not care to write to me. And—and tell her just this : if it were possible to accept her view, I would be more glad than I could say. But we are nowhere taught that duty is invariably delightful. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Jane.

When she looked again, he was gone. And she was sorry ; for he had a winning countenance. If she had never seen De Boys she would have thought him ideally handsome. But De Boys was a king to him—although he was poor and not a person one might wear in a locket !





## CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH TWO LADIES ACT WITHOUT THINKING.

 SOPHIA had resolved to make some appeal to Wrath before the decisive Monday, but she could not resolve on a grievance. To assign jealousy as the cause of her discontent was out of the question. And, as a matter of fact, she did not want to analyse her feelings: she feared calmness as fire might dread water. She only cared to survey her imaginary wrongs with a poetic contempt for base details; she did not choose to torture her heart with questionings, nor demonstrate her husband's innocence by proving herself a fool. So, on Sunday afternoon, she wrote two notes—one to De Boys, the other to her husband.

This was the one to De Boys, which she gave him with her own hands, between the decorous covers of an hymn-book, the same evening :—

“ You must tell them that you intend to walk to Barnet station early to-morrow morning, and leave by the eight o’clock train. Your portmanteau and things can be sent after you later. This will save you from the breakfast-table and tedious good-byes. I will meet you at the cross-roads, and we can discuss our future plans during the journey to London. Leave everything to me. For the present, of course, you must return to Oxford and complete your education.—S. J.”

This was the letter to her husband :—

“ I have discovered a new meaning in life and a new duty. (Never believe that I will disgrace you.) My weakness—I had almost written my sin—has been my love for yourself. But we were not sent into the world to *love*. Subjectivity

is fatal to Art: all great Art is objective. And love is subjectivity in its lowest phase. I use these philosophical terms because they are convenient, and because they are sufficiently comprehensive to cover all subtle — and perhaps agonizing — distinctions. I hope the Madonna will prove your *greatest* work. I will write to Margaret from town. Please tell her this.—Your unhappy SOPHIA.

“P.S.—I shall consult Sir Claretie Mull the moment I reach London. I am perfectly certain that I am consumptive. But do not worry about my health. I feel no pain—only a great sense of *approaching peace*.”

She wept very much over this letter, and felt extremely like the heroine of a psychological romance. To complete the illusion she had taken care to attire herself in flame-coloured silk, made *à la sainte martyre*, with silver cords knotted round her waist, and opals scattered on her breast. She put out the light, and let the moonbeams stream in upon her. It was a

grand situation. Musing on her own sublimity and suffering, she fell sound asleep on the couch. Fortunately, it was in the summer-time.

When she awoke it was morning—Monday morning—and half-past six. At that very moment, De Boys, no doubt, was leaving the house. She threw off her garments, plunged in a cold bath, (which, perhaps, was unlike a psychological heroine), and dressed herself in clinging black. A large hat and a thick veil gave the final touches to her unimpeachably correct costume. Any fairly well-read observer would have known at once, that she was a misunderstood and cruelly injured woman, about to elope with her only friend.

She opened her bedroom door and peeped out: there was no one in sight. The servants, too, even did she meet them, were accustomed to the habits of celebrities on a visit. At The Cloisters nothing was remarkable but the commonplace. She passed two maids and an under-footman on her way to the room, which had been temporarily arranged as a studio for

Wrath. But neither the maids nor the footman showed the smallest surprise when they saw her.

Sophia left her letter on the mantelpiece, and fled from the room through the French casement. Wrath had done well, she thought, to turn his odious picture to the wall : she could never have passed it else—the fascination of recognising Margaret's nose was too engrossing. Under its enchantment, hours sped like minutes.

As she crossed the lawn she cast a glance over her shoulder at Wrath's window. The curtains were not yet drawn : he was probably sleeping — sleeping while she—

A sob—and then for the cross-roads, De Boys, and the Ideal.

Miss Eliza Bellarmine, having much to say on the burning question of Milton's precise meaning when he spoke of a "two-handed engine at the door" (a phrase so beautifully imitated by a modern poet in the striking lines :—

" At the door two hands are knocking—  
Hands of locomotive might—").—

Miss Eliza Bellarmine, having much to say on this great matter, had arisen at crack of dawn to commit her criticism to foolscap. By half-past seven she had explained Milton for all time, and disposed of his modern imitator as "a person of vigorous imaginative faculty, but no education." Her task finished, she strolled out into the garden. It had been raining during the night, and she found herself observing footmarks on the gravel path. The marks were small, and had undoubtedly been made by Sophia Jenyns. No one else in the house wore such preposterous French shoes.

Now Miss Bellarmine was a lady who could put two and two together, and make any required number. She had not been blind to the sympathetic relations which existed between Mr. De Boys Mauden and Mrs. Wrath. (She was always studiously careful to think of the actress as Mrs. Wrath). As a consequence, she had thought herself prepared to see footprints—anywhere. Eliza had very cynical and, of course, very mistaken ideas

about the artistic temperament. But in her secret heart, and very much against that grim adviser—her better judgment—she was strongly attached to the blithe Sophia, and now she saw that the footmarks had their ridiculous toes pointed towards the carriage-drive, she was filled with an unreasonable, but very real alarm. She hurried into the studio by the same window that Sophia had left it some little time before, and her quick eyes went straight to the letter on the mantelpiece. She read the initials “T. W.,” which were written on the envelope in an irresolute, childish hand.

A woman's instinct is rarely at fault ; it is only when she attempts to argue with it that she blunders. Fortunately Eliza trusted her instinct at that particular moment. She knew that De Boys had left The Cloisters that morning and after a somewhat mysterious fashion. Had Sophia gone with him ? If she had, she would surely repent before she reached London. She had been unusually erratic lately, and Miss Bellarmine held her own pri-

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vate opinion with regard to Sophia's state of health. It was extremely interesting—no doubt, trying—but not dangerous ; Lady Hyde-Bassett had the same private opinion ; so, too, had all the women of the household—from the housekeeper to the scullery-maid. But these, not knowing of Miss Jenyns's marriage, could only hope that the Lord would forgive them if they were mistaken—a pious wish which they repeated many times a day, together with their possibly wrong surmise.

Eliza's fingers wandered to the envelope. What folly might it contain ? what mischief might it cause, which neither repentance or explanation could unsay or undo ? What right had Sophia—in no matter how interesting a condition—to play such dangerous pranks on a man like her husband ? Did she deserve to be forgiven ? Eliza heard Wrath's voice in the distance, and without further hesitation she slipped the envelope under the clock. She would give the little fool a chance. If she did not return within two—three—at the most,

four hours, Eliza knew that she could easily find means of bringing the note to light. And then she left the room, smiling. Perhaps she had been able to render Wrath a small act of friendship, and, although he himself could never know of it, this would be a great happiness for her to remember.

A few minutes later she peeped in at the window. He had entered the room and was looking at a sketch of Sophia which hung on the wall. Eliza stole away, feeling like a conspirator.





## CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH THE NEW EVE AND THE  
NEWER ADAM GROW ABSENT-MINDED.

**D**E BOYS stood waiting at the cross-roads when Sophia appeared in sight. He hastened to meet her, his countenance showing the decent, temperate, and subdued enthusiasm which befitted the pioneer of a great philosophical experiment. Sophia, most unreasonably, thought his manner cold—not that she would have seen him otherwise. The Ideal was founded on ice—eternal, Arctic.

“We are fortunate in our day,” she said, in a quaking voice; “it is delightful walking. But I am rather tired. Is there any place where I can rest?”

De Boys looked about him; it

was obviously impossible that she could rest on the ground, and on either side of them were high hedges.

"If you can manage to go on a little further," he said, "we may find a cottage—or something! But I am afraid we have not much time. The train——"

"But there are lots of trains," said Sophia, wearily, "and there is no hurry."

"Will you take my arm?" said De Boys. "We shall not meet any one, and if we do——"

She shrank back; the only arm she ever permitted herself to rest on, was Wrath's.

"Oh, no!" she said, "I hate taking people's arms!"

The young man coloured, and, in an aggrieved tone, murmured an apology.

"I do not wish to take a gloomy view of things," she said, with a certain severity, "nor do I want to be disagreeable, but I hope we are acting wisely. I hope we are not doing wrong!"

"I hope not," he said, with appalling seriousness.

She shivered, although it was a warm morning.

"Of course," he went on, "I obeyed your instructions, because a woman's tact is generally acknowledged to be the best in such matters. But I will not conceal from you that I could wish it might have been arranged a little more openly: I mean, without giving it this clandestine air which—which is not altogether pleasant. It looks too much like running away—and running away is low! Your note was most characteristic: it reminded me of our first meeting. Do you remember it? when you told me that you only saw the honeysuckle!"

He glanced at her sideways and thought she was not looking so much like Jane as usual. But she was still lovely—he could forgive her a great deal. Such is the magnanimity of the wise gander in his judgment of the endearing, if inconsequential, goose.

"Do not think," he said, "that I fail to appreciate your courage. You are only too dauntless! You do not see the dangers which would

appal a—a more ordinary mortal. Oddly enough, after you had left the drawing-room last night Wrath said he had hoped to paint you as *Alcestis* — the ideal, courageous woman, you know, who died in her husband's stead."

"Oh!" said Sophia, faintly, "what—what else did he say?"

"He did not say anything else," said Mauden.

"How did he look when he said it?"

"He was looking at your photograph," said De Boys. His thoughts had wandered to the time when he had last walked on a country road at that hour in the morning. Jane had been with him then. How long ago it seemed! Did it seem so long to Jane? Was she, like all women, fickle? Had she forgotten him, in the pomp and circumstance of her new position? He drew a deep sigh.

"I mean," said Sophia, "was Wrath looking happy, or tired, or interested, or anything?"

"I think he was rather sleepy," said De Boys, "or at least I was. . . . Did I ever tell you how much

you remind me of a Miss Shannon? She is Lady Jane Shannon now. But at one time I knew her very well."

"Really?" said Sophia. "You must tell me about her. . . . I suppose it would be considered a compliment to—to be asked to sit for *Alcestis*?"

"Undoubtedly," said De Boys—"undoubtedly. . . . Yes, as I was saying, you bear the most extraordinary resemblance to Jane. But while your hair is black, hers is a kind of russet gold——"

"Russet gold? How lovely! and so fashionable. . . . What did Margaret say when Wrath said he intended to paint me?"

"I don't think she said anything. . . . I wish you could know Ja—Lady Jane. She has so much originality. I am sure you would become great friends."

"Ye—es. . . . I suppose Margaret looked as though he ought to have asked *her* to be *Alcestis*?"

But De Boys did not hear: he was wondering whether Jane and Sophia really could become great friends. Would Jane quite grasp

the Before-the-Fall Ideal? Would there be any difficulty in explaining—

“Of course,” said Sophia, suddenly, “women *must* feel flattered when Wrath wants to paint them. To begin with, he is a very handsome man.”

“Very handsome indeed!” sighed Mauden. He was thinking of Jane.

“He gives one such an idea of power,” said Sophia; “the moment you see him you feel ‘Here is some one to trust.’”

“Jane is the sort of girl, you know,” said De Boys, “that—that you meet once and never forget. It is not merely because she is beautiful. Her beauty—which is very great—is her least charm.”

“Indeed! I can well believe it. It is only within the last two years that I have realised how very handsome Wrath is. Is it not absurd? when I have been with him ever since I was born! But if you—care—for people, and, of course, I—care for him——”

“Naturally,” said Mauden; “and it is very singular, but if you love people, you don’t know what you

love them for until you lose them.  
And then——”

“Don’t say until you *lose* them,” faltered Sophia, “that sounds so—so awful !”

“It does, doesn’t it ?” said Mauden ; “the sense of loss, of being, as it were, eternally separated, is very terrible. And death is not the only veil : sometimes our own folly . . . and when we have only our own folly to blame it—it is so hopeless and so much harder to bear than——” Where was his fluency? his command of language? Could it be that as thoughts became real, words grew meaningless?

“We—that is Jane and I—grew up together,” he went on ; “we are not related, but it always seemed as though we were. I don’t mean to say that we were like brother and sister, but——”

“I understand,” said Sophia, eagerly, “it is the same with Wrath and myself. It is true that I have never regarded him as my father, but, as you say, a sort of relationship——”

“Have you left him any word—

any explanation ? " said De Boys, in a low voice.

" I wrote him a letter," said Sophia. " Not exactly the sort of letter one would write to a guardian, you know, but nicer ! Do you think he will consider me ungrateful not to have——"

" I am afraid he may," said Mauden.

" I cannot tell you how generous he has always been," she said. " I would not like him to think me ungrateful. . . . Mr. Mauden."

" Yes."

" If you don't mind," she said, weakly, " I think I won't go to London to-day."

The young man tried not to look indecently thankful.

" But," he said, " you cannot go back alone. And your letter ? "

" Luckily," she answered, " I did not mention your name in the letter. I can explain all that. He won't be angry with me." She burst into tears. " He has never been angry with me in his life ! I wish now he had given me one or two good shakes. I am so wicked ! He has brought me up very badly —everybody says it ! "

"Don't cry," said Mauden.

"I can't help it. . . . And I feel so ill. I haven't had any breakfast. I am not fit to be alone. My father was just the same: he killed himself; he never would think things over, and I am just like him; Wrath has always said so."

Mauden did not feel in a mood to gainsay Wrath's opinion. In fact, his reverence and admiration for Wrath's saintliness and long-suffering were increasing every moment.

"Suppose," he said, "we both go back to him and make a clean breast of it?"

"Oh, no!" said Sophia, "you mustn't come. I would not have Margaret know a word about it for the world."

"I must see you safely within the gates, at all events," said Mauden, with firmness. She had already turned and was walking at a rapid pace. Her fatigue was no longer apparent.

"You are not to come with me," she said, with her eyes fixed in the direction of The Cloisters.

"Pardon me," said De Boys, "but I must."

"I insist," said Miss Jenyns, "on returning alone. I will not be made ridiculous!"

He halted, took off his hat, and waited until she had advanced some yards in front of him. At this discreet distance, he followed.

"I will write to you," she called over her shoulder; "but I have made a great mistake. I shall be extremely ill after this!"

He bowed again, but still followed.

"Do you wish," she said, at last, "to compromise me?"

"I cannot leave you unprotected," said Mauden, getting pale. He, too, had a temper.

"I came here alone, and I presume I can return alone. Please do not make me angry."

Matters were at this unhappy stage when they heard the rumble of wheels. Presently a grocer's cart appeared at the far end of the road.

"I will ask this man to drive me back," said Sophia. Then she gave Mauden a fiery glance. "We shall be the talk of the county!"

"Possibly, too, of London," he observed.

"You should not have exposed

me to this," she went on; "it was unkind. Consumption is in my family, and it is well known that consumptives are not responsible for their conduct!" She hailed the grocer with a royal gesture.

"I have walked too far," she said, when he stopped, "will you kindly take me to The Cloisters?"

When she found herself actually seated in the cart, her customary good-humour returned. She lifted her veil and flung an artless smile to heaven.

"How my husband will laugh when I tell him!" she said.

Even months afterwards, Mauden was unable to explain her motive in making this astounding remark at that particular moment. When, however, in later years he confided the whole episode—together, of course, with every other episode of his bachelor career—to the wife of his bosom, (who, for the present, shall be nameless), she explained it without an instant's hesitation.

"She referred to her husband," said the lady, "entirely for the

benefit of the grocer's man! She was not even thinking of *you!*"

At which he could only look incredulous. But he was nevertheless impressed by the truth of her assertion.





## CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH A FARCE IS PLAYED VERY SERIOUSLY.

**B**REAKFAST was always served punctually at nine o'clock at The Cloisters. As the clock chimed the hour, Lady Hyde-Bassett would descend the stairs, and woe to the guest who was not there to observe her freshness and vivacity. On this one point, she was as unreasonably severe as all malleable men and women are, who make up their minds to be unyielding on, at least, one subject. When she entered the breakfast-room, therefore, on that eventful Monday morning, and saw no Sophia Jenyns, her eyebrows began to twitch. Wrath was reading the *Times*, and Miss

Bellarmino was studying a new novel, which dealt with the evolution of the soul from protoplasm to immortality—a work to be attacked when the mind was not predisposed to slumber.

"Where is Sophia?" said Margaret, having wished them both good morning.

"To be sure," said Wrath. "Where is she?"

"I think," said Eliza, slowly, "she has gone for a short walk."

"At this hour," said Margaret, "and without her breakfast?"

"Are you quite sure?" said Wrath.

"I believe," murmured Eliza, "she said last night that she intended to try an early prowl. Did you not hear her say so?"

It was very extraordinary, but neither of them had heard Sophia make the remark.

"But young Mauden——" began Lady Hyde-Bassett.

She caught a beseeching glance from Eliza, and felt a sharp step on her toe. They were now sitting at the table.

"Young Mauden," she went on,

calmly, "was very wise to go by that eight o'clock train."

"I wish," said Wrath, suddenly, "Sophia would not wander about the country like a Tom o' Bedlam. I know she is studying *Ophelia*, but all the same, it is most annoying!"

The two women dared not look up. But they were holding a conversation without words, which is not a difficult feat—although few mortals seem aware of it—when minds are sympathetic, and ordinary means of communication are impossible. To explain this mental phenomenon, however, is work for the metaphysician. We can only say that Lady Hyde-Bassett understood Miss Bellarmine so perfectly, that she lost her appetite for breakfast.

"Could not some one be sent to her room to inquire?" said Wrath, rising from his seat, and oblivious alike of manners, his two companions, and general facts. Thought was swallowed up in sensation, and he recognised the sensation as fear.

"I will go," said Eliza.

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"Thank you," he said ; "you are very good. Thank you."

When she had gone out of the room, he turned to Lady Hyde-Bassett. "Margaret," he said, "do you think I have been blind this last fortnight ? Do you think I have seen nothing ?"

"Seen—nothing ?" she repeated ; "how ?—what ?"

"Do not act," he said ; "be a woman—be honest. You have seen all that I have seen—perhaps more."

"No ! no ! not more . . . it was all very innocent . . . a childish flirtation. . . . I thought it best to ignore it. . . . I would not allow myself to give it consideration."

"Ah ! that is what I thought. . . . The question is—Was I wrong ? Should I have spoken ?"

"No, no. You were right to trust her. The dreadful things we are both fearing are an insult—an injustice. Mauden is the soul of honour. Sophia is light-hearted, but—trust her. Only trust her !"

"I do . . . but . . . where is she now ?"

"Do not ask me ! Do not ask yourself !"

"Is she with Mauden?"

"No! no! no! how can you say it?"

"Why not ask me how I can say it—and live?"

She took his hand. "Tom," she said, "I would swear that she was innocent even if she told me with her own lips——"

"Innocent!" he said, angrily. "Am I so vile already? I want no man or woman to assure me of my wife's innocence. You know," he went on, after a painful pause, "I am naturally jealous. I—I try to conquer this. . . . I am so many years older than she is, and she is so . . . there is every reason why I must love her, and there are none why she should care for me . . . it would be absurd to expect her to sit gazing at me all day—me, bald, dull, plodding. . . . Mauden is her own age, and amusing. . . . It was a crime to marry her: she was a child. She knew nothing about love. She has no idea how much she is to me. I could not tell her, it would frighten her . . . the responsibility——"

"Ah!" said Lady Hyde-Bassett,

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"why did you not speak out and risk the frightening?"

"I was selfish," he went on, not hearing, "and thought only of my own happiness. And I persuaded her—Don't you understand how I must hate myself? Innocent! She is only too innocent. It is I who am guilty!"

"I wish," said Lady Hyde-Bassett—"I wish Eliza would make haste."

"She will not come back," said Wrath, "because she has found the room empty, and because she, too, thinks—"

Then he left her. And Margaret could only sit with her hands clasped, trying her best not to think. For thinking was not to be trusted at that moment. Faith—"the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"—was her only refuge. For there is no virtue so sublime that it cannot be used with advantage even in a comedy situation.

When the grocer stopped his horse at the main entrance to The Cloisters, Sophia got down, gave

the man a tip, and lurked under a tree until he had driven out of sight. Then she went out into the road again, and walked to a certain side-door which was cut in the wall of the kitchen-garden, and which was rarely used except by the servants and the men employed on the estate. She opened this door and found herself face to face with the head-gardener.

"How unlucky!" she exclaimed. "I had just come in to steal some strawberries. Please don't give me any of them, because that would not be the same thing!" And, laughing gaily, she sauntered up the path. The gardener stroked his beard and stared after her. Had not his wife kept him awake the whole of the preceding night, with her "firm beliefs" and "dying breaths" on the subject of Miss Sophia Jenyns? And now she was hankering after strawberries. He whistled.

Sophia, meanwhile, went on her way, rejoicing that she had been able to make such a plausible excuse for entering the grounds by a back-door. She hugged the

elusive hope that Wrath had not yet seen her nonsensical letter, and she was now wondering how she could get round to the studio, where, perhaps, if the Fates were kind, she would find the envelope with its seal unbroken. She glanced at the big clock which smiled from the archway of the stable-yard : it was exactly nine. They would all be at the breakfast-table : she could cross the lawn without the smallest risk of meeting either Wrath, or Margaret, or Eliza Bellarmine. Sophia caught up her skirt and ran. Once started, she did not seem able to stop ; she had only a frantic notion that she was chasing her own head. The chase ended, however, when she reached the studio window. Her limbs grew heavy and her sight dim ; she stumbled over the threshold, and groped her way to the mantelpiece. The letter was gone. She tore off her veil and stared helplessly about the room. Then something made her look under the clock. It was there, after all. She thrust the hateful thing into her pocket, and fell.

Wrath found her senseless on the floor when he entered the studio a few moments later.





## CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH A YOUNG GENTLEMAN  
OWNS HIS UNWORTHINESS.

HE Dowager Countess of Warbeck was confined to her bed for some days after the unhappy disagreement with her grandson. Sir Claretie Mull did not, however, find in her symptoms any grave cause for alarm, and he told the young Earl as much, adding, that if he thought of leaving England, there was no earthly reason why he should not do so. His lordship, therefore, wrote the Dowager an affectionate adieu, expressing his regret that she would not see him, and assuring her of his unalterable love. With kindest regards to his cousin, Lady Jane, he remained ever her devoted grandson, Warbeck.

"Never mention his name in my presence," said the Countess to Jane, after she had read this; "when he repents of his impious conduct, I will forgive him. But until then my only course is to forget."

On the following Monday, she was still weak, but able to lie on the sofa. Jane was reading aloud to her when a visitor was announced in the person of "Mr. Mauden." He had asked to see Lady Jane Shannon.

"You cannot see him to-day," said the Countess, sharply; "it would be most improper. Tell him to come when I am strong enough to receive visitors."

"I am afraid I must see him, dear grandmama," said Jane, with a fine blush, "whether it is proper or not."

"What?" said the Dowager. "A little louder, my love. This attack has affected my hearing." And her blue eyes looked black.

"I said," repeated Jane, without flinching, "I am afraid I must see Mr. Mauden whether it is proper or improper. He is a very old friend."

"Oh!" said her ladyship—"oh!

I remember now who he is. The farmer person who is going to be a schoolmaster. See the good creature, by all means!"

The Countess was always most triumphant when she was most defeated.

As Jane ran downstairs to the drawing-room she lost a little of her colour, but when she opened the door, and saw De Boys actually standing on the hearthrug, she grew quite white. He, on his part, blushed as he came forward to meet her.

She gave him her right hand and he took the other. Thus he held them both, nor did he seem anxious to release either.

"Jane," he said, "why have you got this beastly money? and why are you living at this awful Queen's Gate? and—why have you forgotten me?"

"I haven't!"

"But you have. Here is your last letter—all about the South Kensington Museum and Greek vases. I don't want to hear about Greek vases; I want to hear about you. Dear, dear, dearest, why have

you got so cultured? why do you quote Browning? why do you write about ideals and all such tiresome rubbish? I would not give your old letters about the guinea-pig for the whole of Tennyson! And you have got your hair done differently. Let me see whether I like it? Yes, I do. Are the sleeves meant to look like a bishop's? Jane, may I kiss you?"

"No," said Jane.

Perhaps he did not hear. At all events, it made no difference. And, indeed, she did not seem to think that it would. His kisses were becoming (from his own point of view) agreeably indefinite when she asked a question. This was the question—

"Did you leave The Cloisters very early this morning?"

"Shall we sit over there by that green dragon?" he suggested, gravely.

He chose a chair with its back to the light. Jane sat opposite with the sun shining in on her face. This, he felt, was as it should be. He did not like to see women afraid of the sun.

"I left The Cloisters this morning," he said, "and I return to Oxford this afternoon."

She checked a sigh ; she certainly could not expect him to waste his time with her.

"Do you like Lady Hyde-Basset ?" she said, trying to look cheerful.

"Very much," said De Boys ; "she is charming. But she is whim-ish, of course, like most women."

"And that Miss Bellarmine you mentioned in your last letter ?"

"She has a fine figure, but she jaws too much. No one can get a word in, when she takes up an argument. I cannot bear these blue-stockings, myself. Fielding's *Amelia* is, in my mind, the highest type of woman ! "

"You used to say she was insipid."

"Ah, that was a schoolboy's verdict."

"And what about that Miss Sophia Jenyns you mentioned in your first letter ? She must have been the most interesting of them all."

"Yes, I think one would call her interesting. In the beginning she reminded me—in a very faint degree—of you. But you have really nothing in common."

"I suppose she is very beautiful?" she sighed. "Grandmama says she is the loveliest actress in Europe."

"She *is* lovely—for an actress," he said; "there is a glamour about her which some people might find very attractive. . . . But I have nothing to say against her. She is rather uncertain in temper: not a woman one could depend on. She has no feeling. And what is a woman—no matter how pretty she may be—unless she has feeling? I would call Miss Jenyns an egoist; very fascinating, but for all that, an egoist. And egoism is, I think, the eighth deadly sin. It is the special sin of this century. But, Jane, don't let us talk of -Isms and -Ivities. I am sick of them, dearest. One heard of nothing else at The Cloisters. An enervating atmosphere! If I had been there another week I should have lost all ambition. I feel as though I had stepped from a window conserva-

tory into the fresh woods. In God's name, let us be natural ; let us drop jargon ; let us only remember that we love each other—for nothing else matters."

"Are you sure you won't get tired of me ? I am not clever and intellectual. I understand you, dear, but I cannot answer properly. It—it is horrid to feel so ignorant when you find yourself talking to—to some one who is accustomed to meet geniuses, and men—and women—who can say something about every thing, and just in the right way. Now I suppose if I tried I could say something, too, but it wouldn't sound a bit like the conversation in novels. I always think in such short words ! "

"The perfection of literary style—or of conversational style—is to be simple," said De Boys—"simplicity is delicious, and lamentably rare. I should hate a wife who could turn me into an epigram."

"A wife !" she murmured.

"Dearest, you are the only woman in my world. The rest are your reflection ; when I see any beauty or charm in a woman it

is because she reminds me of you."

Jane blushed. "I think I can understand that," she said, "because, after you had left Brentmore, I used to talk to Henry Burkett—the one who sings in the choir—and—and sometimes I used to forget, and think he was you. But I soon found the difference. You are not angry with me?"

"Burkett is such a smug!"

"But I missed you so terribly! And I never looked at him when I could help it. When I did look I used to half-close my eyes. That made him more indistinct."

"Still, I do not care to think that you have flirted with men. If any one else had told me——"

"It wasn't flirting, De Boys. We only talked about books, and poetry, and religion, and things like that. I hope you don't think——"

"I am quite sure, dearest, that your intentions in the matter were beyond reproach. At the same time, religion is rather an intimate subject; I mean, it covers everything or anything. If you begin a conversation on religion there is

no saying how it will end. It would entirely depend on the view you happened to take. For this reason, it is not a subject for a young girl to discuss with strange men ; nor, in fact, with any man except her husband—or some clergyman of whom he approved."

"A girl must say something," said Jane, whose meekness had its limit ; "what did Miss Jenyns talk about ? She is only two years older than I am."

"Miss Jenyns," said Mauden, "is a woman of the world. Some day I will tell you more about her. But now I want to hear about you. I must leave in half an hour."

"So soon ?" said Jane. "I wish you had told me you were coming. I should have had so much happiness watching for you."

"I—I came here on impulse, my dearest. I—I—did not know myself that I was coming to see you when I left The Cloisters this morning. But when I reached London, I found I could not leave it until I had—" He stopped short, struggled with his conscience, and then

blurted out—"Jane, I want you to forgive me for something."

"Forgive you?" she said, "what have you done?" and she kissed his hand.

"I am the meanest beast that walks," said her hero, blushing to his finger-tips—"I am, indeed. I do not deserve——" She smiled into his face with angelic disbelief. "I do not deserve you," he said, "and I have always known it." He sighed—"I am afraid we cannot marry for a year or two?"

"Not for ages!"

"And then, there is your money!"

"I can give most of it to the poor relations. It will soon go that way. They want ever so many more things than I do! But you will be rich, too, when you are a Professor and write learned books. Or, if you are not exactly rich, you will be famous—which is much better."

"You have always believed in me. But if I fail——"

"You would never fail; you might be unfortunate. But then I could only love you more than ever."

"Write to me every day, dearest, and tell me that."

"How much do you love me?"

"I don't know," he said, solemnly; "and that has been the cause of all my trouble."

"What trouble?"

"The trouble I want you to forgive."

She put her arms round his neck. "Didn't you say," she said, "that nothing mattered so long as we loved each other?"

"It would never have happened," he stammered, "if she had not looked so much like you."

"I know all about it," she said; "don't tell me any more—unless you like."

"But—how do you know?"

"I saw it in your face—when I came in."

"I shall never understand women!" exclaimed De Boys.

"I suppose," she said, "we *are* rather difficult."

"I never told her," he murmured, "that I loved her. It—it was only sympathy. . . . And, Jane—never write me cold letters again."

"Do you think I could—after this?" said his affianced.

And so, I think, we may leave them.





## CHAPTER XVIII.

### IN WHICH SOPHIA WAKES UP.

**M**ANY hours of pain and several weeks of dangerous illness were the result of Sophia's bite at the Ideal—a result which must not surprise us, since the psychological mystery she tasted is, as all pious souls know, the modern development of the antediluvian apple. But Sophia was young and had much to live for—much, too, to atone for. Tears had washed the dust from her eyes as only tears can, and, as she wept over her own folly, she knew that she was really crying for the first time in her life. Crystal drops shed over our own excellence are nothing in the world. They may, however, have their use in the city that is paved with good intentions.

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Wrath watched day and night by the bedside of his wife. Their relationship was no longer concealed, for Nature, who hates false appearances, and is, in fact, a very blab to those who have ears to hear, had made straightforwardness necessary. And Wrath, in spite of his anxiety, was happier than he had been, even at his happiest moments, since the day of the secret marriage. He held his breath at the shortness of time before him in which to retrieve the two past years of dissimulation, of double-facedness. As all penitents, he longed to be born again, that he might wage a new life with the arts of an old experience. He blamed himself less for keeping his promise to Sophia than for making it. The weakness, the moral cowardice of the matter lay, in his judgment, in the submitting to such a condition. It brought him no ease of mind to remember that the lunatic, the lover, and the poet were admitted by a charitable world to be more or less irresponsible for their follies. With all his faults he was not a man to lie pleasantly to his own conscience. He

had acted wrongly, and he knew it ; what was more, he had been perfectly aware that he was acting wrongly when he gave the miserable promise. He had made up his mind to marry Sophia, and he had not been willing to run any risk of losing her. There was no condition so unwise, so ill-considered, or so desperate but he would have accepted it, rather than forfeit even one of her smiles. Such was the truth. (If a man cannot be a hero to his hired valet, we must not wonder if he looks small in the presence of his free conscience.) Fear, for the enormities he might have committed, was the other side of his remorse for the wrong, he had actually done. It was an awkward subject viewed from any point of consideration. But awkward as it was, it was even grateful in comparison with another matter, which haunted him constantly, and which seemed past forgiveness or hope. This matter was his conversation with Lady Hyde-Bassett on that never-to-be-forgotten Monday morning. It was contemptible enough, God knew, to have sus-

pected his saintly wife of having eloped with Mauden ; but to have expressed the despicable thought in words, to have allowed the curbed jealousy of a lifetime to break away from all bounds just when control was most necessary—what could he call himself ? To think of all this in the long hours of the night, when Sophia was lying half-unconscious, or in pain, was a terrible punishment for his injustice, but he would not own that it was terrible enough.

One afternoon Sophia woke up from a sleep and found Wrath watching her. It was a daily experience, but on that particular afternoon she seemed to see him more distinctly than usual. He was looking old and careworn, and was so changed, that she found herself wondering whether she had not lost all idea of time, and whether her illness had lasted—not a few weeks as she imagined—but many years. She asked Wrath for a hand-glass,—she thought her hair must be grey.

He gave it to her in silence. She

looked from the mirror to her husband, and from her husband to the mirror. Her face had not suffered so much from illness as his, from anxiety. She was pale in the cheeks, and a little dark round the eyes, but otherwise she seemed even younger for her suffering. She might have been a girl in her first teens.

"Tom," she said, "are you very tired?"

"Tired? Oh, no."

"Then talk to me. Tell me what you are thinking about."

"I am thinking of you," he said, quietly.

"Don't think about *me*—I am horrid."

This was quite in her old manner, and for a moment he smiled. It was a long-established custom between them, that she should call herself names, while he expressed his horror at the blasphemy. It was the usual prelude to most of their conversations.

"But I really mean it to-day," she said. This guileless and unconscious admission of the usual insincerity of her self-depreciation

made them both laugh. It was Sophia's saving grace that she could, at times, survey herself from a distance. When she was not the first, she would at least be the second, to mock at her own extravagancies. But it may be that she carried this self-ridicule to excess, and saw her actions in a ludicrous light when they were rather sad than funny. Thus she had gradually lost all belief in her own earnestness. Sometimes it seemed that her love for Wrath was a jest, that life and death were alike jests, that the world itself was the Creator's big joke with mankind. Everything was so grotesque, so badly rehearsed. the curtain went up too soon and came down too late ; parts were mumbled, or shouted, or gabbed, or left unspoken ; cues were disregarded ; heroes were knock-kneed, and heroines had thick ankles ; fools made mirth with such a solemn air, and the wise were solemn so foolishly ; men and women seemed not themselves, but their caricatures ; it was all wildly comic, farcical, unnatural, and inartistic. The only sad part was, that one

ached from laughing till one cried at the pain. But this, too, was a joke.

There was something inhuman, almost cruel, in Sophia's humour which made Wrath unhappy—all but fearful. Men, moreover, do not like their wives to have too clear a perception of the ludicrous—it is a masculine theory that laughter must be on the male side only. A man knows when laughter is a spoil-sport : he can postpone it when necessary. But a woman will laugh—if she know how—at the right moment or the wrong, usually, too, when a man would prefer to see her demure.

Although Wrath joined in his wife's merriment on this particular afternoon, it did not seem to him that the occasion was especially amusing.

"Things are still ridiculous," she said, suddenly, "but they are not ridiculous in quite the same way as they used to be. When I laugh now, I do not feel so much like crying. I know that what looks so absurd at present, will one day be very grand and beautiful. Some kinds

of knowledge you cannot study—you find them when you are looking for something else. I have learnt all this by accident. I cannot tell you how. But I have learnt it so well that I can never forget it. . . . I shall never again be so foolish—so obstinate as I was. You will see such a difference in me! And, Tom—I want to tell you about my walk—that morning."

"No, no!" he said; "let me tell you something first. Will you ever forgive me? I—I thought you were with Mauden!"

The clock had never ticked so loudly: Sophia could hear nothing else. Or was it her own heart?

"I thought you were with Mauden," he repeated. "I thought you had gone to London with him. I—I was brutally jealous——"

"Tom!"

"I knew it was infamous. Do you think I will ever forgive myself?"

"But, Tom——" What would he say if he knew the whole truth? She could atone for her folly none the less because he knew nothing about it. Besides, he would lose all

respect for her if she told him. He would despise her : perhaps his love would change to dislike. Men, even the best, were not so forgiving as women.

"Tom," she said, desperately, "you—you were quite right. I *was* with Mauden—I *was* going to London with him, but—but I changed my mind ! It was all a mistake. I thought—you were tired of me ! "

She trembled for his answer. He had grown so pale ; he looked so stern.

" You were going to London with Mauden ? " he said.

" Yes."

" Why did you change your mind ? "

" Because—I remembered *you*."

" You remembered me ! That was thoughtful." He drew his hand across his brow and bowed his head. We have surely never such need to show humiliation as when we are in the presence of a fallen idol.

It is not the god, which was no god, that suffers, but its former worshipper, who sees what appeared divinity, corruption, and what looked strength, rottenness. And, in at

least some slight degree, this terrible contemplation must be made by all mortals who place their entire faith in mere flesh-and-blood : who love the creature, which has beauty that we may desire it, more than the Creator whom no man hath at any time seen. One who wrote of human affection with a tenderness and understanding past comparison —who knew its infinite power and no less infinite weakness—one who has taught that by loving man we best learn how to love his Maker, has also warned us—“Keep yourselves from idols.”

Wrath, in his hour of disillusion, had no words : the tragedy in common life lies in the thinking—not in the speaking.

The sound at last reached him of a woman, crying ; he looked, and though he no longer beheld a heavenly spirit, infallible and sinless, he saw his wife.

“ You forget—the circumstances,” sobbed Sophia. “ I was not well. And think how ill I have been ! ”

His frown vanished, but it left its scar. “ My dearest,” he said, gently, “ whatever has happened,

I know it has all been my fault ! My fault entirely ! I shall never cease to reproach myself."

"Let me tell you all about it," said Sophia ; and then between laughter and tears she confessed the whole story. "Poor young Mauden is not to blame," she wound up, "because he did not know I was married!"

"My fault entirely !" repeated Wrath. And what a relief it was to shift all her burden on his own shoulders ! He was the transgressor —the brute beast with no understanding—she was still his angel of light.

"You are so good to me," she whimpered, "but I will never be so wicked again."

"There shall be no more of these detestable circumstances," he said.

"I don't mind them so much, if I know what they mean," said Sophia, "and next time, of course, I shall know ! Some day I want to have a son, and I want him to be just like you !"

"It is impossible to look into the future," said Wrath ; "but if—by

any chance—we had a son, I think he would be rather remarkable."

"He would be a genius," said Sophia.

"But he must have your face," said Wrath.

"No," said Sophia, "if he is not exactly like you, I shall be disappointed."

"I think," said Wrath, "we must make him a lawyer. He might become Lord Chancellor."

"Or he might be a Cardinal. Wouldn't that be nicer?"

At which moment, Lady Hyde-Bassett came in with some flowers for the invalid.

"Margaret," said Sophia, "if you had a son, would you rather see him a Cardinal or a Lord Chancellor? Because we were just saying——"

Wrath strode away to the window. And looking out, he saw a fair world. How wrong it was to be cynical! As if there was no such thing as earthly happiness. Away! away! ye philosophers of the mud-heap. The soul of man is a garden where, as he sows, so he shall reap. If ye would gather roses, do not sow rotten seeds. Away! away!



## EPILOGUE.

HEN Lady Jane Shannon attained her one-and-twentieth year she married the brilliant young scholar De Boys Mauden who, at present, is editing Plato as he has never been edited before, and never will be, again. As this magnificent enterprise will occupy some nine hours of each day for the next thirty years of his life, we may safely assume that much fame will accrue to his literary executors.

The Earl of Warbeck astonished society by becoming first a Roman Catholic, and then a priest. This did not kill his grandmother, as many people feared it might, but she lived many years to enjoy the pleasure of writing wills in his favour, and revoking them at the rate of three a month. He also dined with

her frequently, because, as she told her friends, she would never despair of converting him back to Christianity and the usual number of commandments.

Farmer Battle and Miss Caroline Battle are still living, and rank next in Jane's heart after De Boys and a certain small edition of De Boys. This young gentleman already holds a decided opinion on the due subjection of women to their lords : an opinion which Jane has her own method of refuting—a method so subtle, however, that Mauden has never yet been able to perceive it. He is only conscious that his wife's will looks so much like his own, that he is never able to tell which is which. He, at all events, gives the word of command and she always wears an air of the most charming obedience. Why analyse such an harmonious condition of things ?

Lady Hyde-Bassett lived long enough to see her dear Eliza married to Mr. Claverhouse Digges, the editor of the *Argus*. It was the last match Margaret made, and, as she declared, the most satisfactory. She died very peacefully—if rather sud-

denly—and her last words were, that she had never been so happy. It was quite impossible to mourn over one who showed such relief at leaving this world, and who enjoyed such a full and perfect assurance of the next. Her great wealth was left as a bequest to be used for the support of such scholars, authors, and artists, who preferred rather to do good work for nothing, than bad work for large fees. The bequest is now managed by a committee, and it has not been of service to those for whom her ladyship intended it. But her intentions were good, and the starving scholars, authors, and artists who see the prosperous, incompetent, and dishonest making off with their treasure, have, let us hope, none the less gratitude for Lady Hyde-Bassett's benevolent design.

Wrath and Sophia have a small daughter, and now they wonder why they wanted a son. She is such an amazing and unique creation. They have named her "Margaret," after one they both loved—but Wrath especially. Had she not believed in Sophia when even he himself had doubted her?

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